

The Live End

by Philip Buckland



A Frank Harley mystery

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Also in the Frank Hurley series:

The Cranston Occurrence

The Hiders

Lois Latham

Invisible, We're Here

And also by Philip Buckland:

*A Scientist is Missing -
an Apollo Bureau spy adventure*

CHAPTER I

That was one of the things about Bellingham, Washington that I liked: it rained a lot. And after it rained, lawns and plants looked healthy and fresh and new as something new created. That was what my lawn looked like when I stepped out of my place to get into my car and go over to my office and wait for business to come my way. And that was what the endless stream of other lawns and plants looked like as I drove through it on my way over to my office, too.

My office was on Cornwall Avenue.

When I reached my office, I saw the pile of letters on the floor. I picked them up and walked over to my answering machine and turned it on and got behind my desk and sat down behind it and looked at the letters while I listened to the answering machine. Then I looked suddenly at the answering

machine when I heard who had left her message on my answering machine--Belinda Cranston--a woman I had investigated.*

I was surprised that she had left a message on my answering machine. I hadn't seen or heard from her ever since I had finished my investigation. I listened to her message.

After I listened to her message, I turned the answering machine off and called Belinda at Consolidated Industries so I could talk to her. Her message said that she needed to talk to me about something, and that I could still get a hold of her at Consolidated Industries. She still worked in the research department of Consolidated Industries. Or, I could still get a hold of her at her place. She still lived there.

"Good morning," a female voice said. "Consolidated Industries."

"Good morning," I said. "Research Department, please."

* In the Frank Hurley novel, *The Cranston Occurrence*.

"I'll connect you to Research," she said.
And did.

"Research," a female voice said.

"Belinda Cranston, please," I said.

"This is Belinda."

"Ms Cranston, this is Frank Hurley. I just got in and got your message."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Hurley. I need to talk to you about something. So I'd like to make an appointment to talk to you about this something."

"What's it about?"

"Well, I'd rather tell you about it when we meet. Say tomorrow morning at ten o'clock at Consolidated Industries inside Peter Jordan's office?"

"Inside Peter Jordan's office?"

"That's right."

"All right. I'll be there."

"Fine," Then Belinda hung up.

So did I. Then I wrote down in my desk calendar where and when my appointment

with Belinda was. After that, I looked at my watch. Nine eleven.

I had more than enough time to find out from Peter Jordan if *he* knew why Belinda wanted to talk to me, and to find out what new information on Belinda I could find. I was going to need to do that. She might have changed since the last time I had seen her, or there might be something new about her since the last time I had seen her. I picked up the phone and called Consolidated Industries again and asked to be connected to Peter Jordan. The girl I talked to connected me to Peter.

"Peter Jordan," he said when he came on.

"Mr. Jordan?" I said. "This is Frank Hurley."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Hurley. How are you?"

"Fine. You?"

"Fine."

"I just talked with Belinda Cranston. She said she'd like to talk to me about something in your office tomorrow morning."

"That's right."

"Would you know what it's about?"

"Yes, I do, but *she'd* like to tell you about it. It was her idea to hire you for this."

"Oh?"

"Yes. She'll explain everything to you tomorrow."

"All right. Thank you."

"You're welcome," Then Peter hung up.

So did I. Then I decided not to call up anyone else who had been in on my previous investigation and ask *them* why Belinda wanted to see me tomorrow morning in Peter Jordan's office, so I could humor Belinda on what she wanted to do. Peter Jordan was the head of Consolidated Industries, and he had also been a victim of a conspiracy that I had discovered. I looked at my watch again. Nine twenty-six. Then I got on the computer so I could find out what I can about Belinda. She was the same as before. Nothing new about her. She still lived here in Bellingham, and she still lived

at the same place here in Bellingham, and she still worked for the research department of Consolidated Industries. Still a Casper Milquetoast. Still a good citizen. Still had a good credit rating. Because of this, she'd be able to pay my fee of twenty five dollars an hour--if I take whatever case she gives me. Then I turned the computer off. There wasn't anything else about Belinda I needed to know. Not only that, I didn't need to use the computer anymore right now. Then I looked at my watch again. Nine thirty-eight.

There wasn't anything else about my appointment with Belinda I could do until tomorrow. So I continued looking at the mail while I waited for more business to come my way. There would be the possibility that more business would come my way as well as I had that appointment with Belinda.

After I discovered that there wasn't anything interesting in the mail, I threw all of the letters into the wastebasket and took

the remote control out of the top drawer of my desk and turned on the TV with the remote control and watched TV while I continued waiting for more business to come my way.

It was eleven o'clock now, and I was getting hungry. So I turned the TV off and put the remote control back into the top drawer of my desk, and then I turned on my answering machine and locked up my office and got into my Dodge and drove and left my office and looked around for a good place to eat at.

Win's a drive in restaurant in Fairhaven. I had eaten there before. It was one of my favorite places to eat at.

I was here at Win's now. Sitting at a booth and having a deluxe cheeseburger and washing it down with a Coke and a chocolate shake.

I felt better after I had eaten. Then I left Win's and went back to my office so I could

continue waiting for more business to come my way.

I was here at my office now. Sitting behind my desk and watching TV to pass the time while I waited for more business to come way.

It was five o'clock now, and between the time I had come back here to my office after I had eaten and had waited for more business to come my way and now, no more business had come my way today. So I decided to call it a day on waiting for more business to come my way today, and then I turned the TV off and put the remote control back into the top drawer of my desk, and then I turned on my answering machine and locked up the office and got into my car and left the office and looked around for a good place to eat at. I was in the mood to eat out for dinner this time.

Akroteri was a fine Greek restaurant. It was here in downtown Bellingham. I had

eaten here before. It was another place I liked to eat at.

I was here at Akroteri now. Sitting at a table and eating chicken Savloki and washing it down with beer. For dessert I had chocolate ice cream.

I felt better after I had eaten. Now I left a nice tip on the table and paid the check, and then I left the restaurant and went home.

Home was on Liberty Street.

When I got here, I got undressed and took a shower, and then I got into my pajamas and bathrobe and slippers and went into the living room and watched TV until it was time to go to bed. Then I turned the TV off and went into *my* room and turned on the light, and then I set the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up at tomorrow morning, and then I put my Smith and Wesson .38 Special underneath the pillow, and then I took my bathrobe and slippers off, and then I turned off the light and got into bed and went to sleep. It was time now

for me to get a good night's sleep for my appointment with Belinda tomorrow.

CHAPTER II

The next morning, I drove over to Consolidated Industries to keep my appointment with Belinda.

Peter's office was on the top floor. I stepped inside it and closed the door. Peter's office was big and wide and spacious and cream white with a beige carpet, and on one side of the room was a long shiny black leather couch with a cedar coffee table before it, and surrounding the couch and coffee table were shiny black leather armchairs, and on side of the couch and coffee table, and against the wall, was a sideboard. Decorating most of the walls inside Peter's office was various pictures and paintings of interesting, and lining most of the other walls was the kind of office equipment that Peter used in his job as head of Consolidated Industries. And opposite the

front door of Peter's office and in front of the long window that was covered by thick off white drapes were Peter's big cedar desk and some shiny brown leather armchairs in front of his desk.

Peter himself was standing behind his desk, and Belinda was sitting on one side of his desk. I walked over to Peter and Belinda to greet them.

Peter was three inches taller than me, lean, had blond hair, dark blue eyes, a tapering head, wry features, and he was wearing a double breasted dark charcoal gray suit with grayish pinstripes and a white shirt and a burgundy tie.

I shook hands with Peter. His grip was firm.

Belinda stood up and walked over to me. She still looked the same as before: tall, plump, had long, thick black hair, brown eyes, an oval shaped face, thin lips, and she wasn't wearing makeup. What she was wearing right now were a light blue blouse

and blue pants and white tennis shoes. She hugged me when she got to me and I hugged her back and she said she was glad to see me again. And *I* told *her* that I was glad to see *her* again. Then she and Peter and I sat down.

"Before Belinda tells you why she needs to talk to you," Peter said to me. "I want to let you know that I will be paying your fee--if you take the case. It's my way of thanking you for discovering that conspiracy against me, and for you and the police preventing that conspiracy."

"You're welcome, Mr. Jordan," I said to him. "I am glad that I did discover that conspiracy, and I am glad that the police and I prevented the conspiracy."

"Of course. Lieutenant Pritchard recommended you for what Belinda wants to talk to you about. He and Belinda told me that you're a private investigator, that you look into anything secret or illegal." Craig

Pritchard was a lieutenant in the detective unit of the Bellingham police department.

"That's right. I do."

"What I need to talk to you about is another person who used to work in our research department," Belinda told me. "Her name was Lydia Hollister--"

"Oh, yes, I read about her death in the newspapers. She was the victim of robbery and murder. I'm sorry about your friend."

"Thank you. And I heard about her being the victim of robbery and murder on TV. But I don't think she was the victim of robbery and murder. Instead, I think someone killed her and made it look like she was the victim of robbery and murder so there wouldn't be an investigation of her death."

I wondered about this. "What makes you say that?"

"While she was vacationing in Long Beach, California, she saw a friend of ours who used to work in our research department before she moved down to Long

Beach. She's a paralegal now. Her name is Stephanie Loren. Lydia also met and went out with a man named Harold Grimm. He's lives in Seal Beach, California. He's in the business of finding things that people want. A few days before Lydia's vacation was over, we heard that she was killed here in Bellingham and how she was killed. After that, and at work, we cleaned out her desk and kept the things we wanted, and we noticed that Lydia got a message from Stephanie. We played back the message and listened. It said that Stephanie found out something about Harold Grimm, something that says that Grimm is up to something illegal. And because of this, she was going to try to find out what it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to. And then she advised Lydia not to go out with Grimm again the next time she goes down to Long Beach. Now because of this message, and because Lydia was killed here in Bellingham a few days before her vacation was over, we have reason

to believe that Grimm's being up to something illegal has something to do with Lydia's death. And we'd like for you to find out if Grimm's being up to something illegal has something to do with Lydia's death, and go down to Long Beach and help Stephanie find out what it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to, too. She may be a paralegal, but she's not a private investigator. And it looks like she'll need to have a private investigator help her out on this."

"Yes, it does. Well, has it occurred to you that Lydia's death may not have anything to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal? That she really was robbed and murdered?"

"We thought of that. But the just same we would like for you to find out if Lydia's death has something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal, *and* help Stephanie find out what it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to."

"I see. When you heard that message from Stephanie, did you call her and tell her Lydia's dead?"

"Yes, we did. And we also told her we heard her message, and she told us she's still trying to find out if Grimm is up to something illegal."

"I see. Did you tell her you were going to have a private investigator help her find out what it is that's illegal that Grimm's up to and find out if Lydia's death has something to do with whatever it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to?"

"No, we didn't. We thought we'd talk to you about this before we tell Stephanie we have a private investigator help her find out if what it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to *and* find out if Lydia's death has something to do with whatever it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to."

"I see. Well, didn't you talk to the police about this before you talked to a private investigator about this?"

"Yes, we did. We talked to Lieutenant Pritchard about it. But he told us there's nothing the police can do about it. All we have is a theory, no evidence. Then he suggested that we talk to you about it."

"Of course. Well, what I think I should do is start the investigation here in Bellingham since Lydia was killed here in Bellingham, then tell you what I find out. Then we can call Stephanie and tell her I'll go down to Long Beach and help her find out what it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to as well as continue trying to find out if Lydia's death has something to do with whatever it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to. Until we call her up and tell her I'll go down to Long Beach and help her find out what it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to and continue trying to find out if Lydia's death has something to do with whatever it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to, we leave her alone and let her continue her investigation of Grimm. That's the way I'd

like to play it. I'd like to find out if the answer is here in Bellingham, or if it's in Long Beach--if Lydia's death has something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal."

"Then you'll take the case?"

"Yes, I will,"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Hurley."

"You're welcome, Ms Cranston."

"And we'll do what you say about Stephanie."

"Good. Now." Then I looked at Peter and spoke to him: "My fee is twenty five dollars an hour." Then I took my pen and notebook out of my pocket and spoke to Belinda again: "I'll need to know some things; where here in Bellingham did Lydia live?"

Belinda told me and I wrote it down.

"Where in Long Beach does Stephanie live?"

Belinda told me and I wrote it down.

"What's her home phone number?"

Belinda told me both Stephanie's cell and landline phone numbers and I wrote them down.

"Where in Long Beach does Stephanie work?"

Belinda told me and I wrote it down.

"What's her work phone number?"

Belinda told me and I wrote it down. Then I put my pen and notebook back into my pocket and spoke to both Peter *and* Belinda. "Well, I think I have everything." Then I stood up and spoke to Peter and Belinda again: "I'll be in touch. Bye."

"Bye," Peter said.

"Bye," Belinda said.

Then I left.

I was getting hungry, so after I left Consolidated Industries, I looked around for a good place to eat at.

Sol Mexico was on Lakeway Drive. It was a wonderful Mexican restaurant. I had eaten there before. It was another good place I liked to eat at.

I was here at Sol Mexico now. Sitting at a booth and eating chips and washing them down with Coke while I waited for the meal I had ordered to come.

I also thought about the case. If Lydia's death had something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal, then why was Lydia killed here in Bellingham? Why wasn't she killed down there in Long Beach? If Lydia had had some kind of involvement in Grimm's being up to something illegal, but Grimm didn't like that involvement, or if Lydia had done something else that Grimm didn't like, and either reason required her death, then Grimm would have killed Lydia right away, or he would have had her killed right away, and she would have died down there in Long Beach and not up here in Bellingham. It would be natural to get rid of someone right away if that person were a threat to the other person.

And then there was the killer. If he lived down in Long Beach, then he must have

followed Lydia back here to Bellingham and killed her here in Bellingham, and then he would have returned to Long Beach. Or if he lived here in Bellingham, then someone who lived down in Long Beach must have called him and told him to kill Lydia when she gets here to Bellingham.

But I wasn't going to find the killer while I start the investigation here in Bellingham. Whoever he was, he must have gone back to Long Beach after he had killed Lydia. There was no reason for him to hang around here in Bellingham after he had killed her--if he lived in Long Beach. But if he lived here in Bellingham, then he must have made sure that no one knows he had killed Lydia, and that there was nothing to connect him to the killing. But there was the possibility that he would show up anytime during the investigation.

My meal came, so I dug right into it: a taco, a chili relleno, rice, beans, and I washed all of this down with more Coke.

I felt better now. Then I left a nice tip on the table and paid the check and left Sol Mexico and went back to my office so I could start a file on the case. I was going to need to start a file on the case before I start the investigation.

I was here at my office now. Sitting behind my desk and writing HOLLISTER COMBINATION CASE on the folder. Because Belinda and her friends had reason to believe that Grimm's being up to something illegal had something to do with Lydia's death. Then I got on the computer and got the information on Lydia and Belinda and Peter and Stephanie and Grimm and printed it out and put it in the folder.

Lydia had lived in Seattle, Washington for a few years. Then she had moved here to Bellingham and had done various jobs here in Bellingham until she had gone to work at Consolidated Industries. Good citizen. Nice girl.

And then there was the information on Belinda. I had already read that.

And then there was the information on Peter. Had lived here in Bellingham all of his life. He was the owner of several different corporations and industries. Good citizen.

And there was Stephanie. The information on her was the same as what Belinda had told me.

And then there was Grimm. Had lived in Long Beach most of his life. Then he moved to Seal Beach. He was in the business of getting things people wanted. Model citizen.

After I printed out all of this information and put it in the folder of the file on the Hollister combination case, I wrote a statement of everything that Belinda and Peter and I had talked about at our meeting at Consolidated Industries. Then I put the statement into the folder, and then I turned the computer off. I wasn't going to need to use it anymore right now. Then I looked at my watch. Twelve ten.

I had time to go back to my place and get a good night's sleep, and then tonight, I could go over to Lydia's place and search it. Maybe something at her place would tell me what was going on. So I unlocked the filing cabinet and put the file on the Hollister combination case into the cabinet, and then I locked up the cabinet, and then I turned on the answering machine and locked up the office and got into my car and drove back to my place and went to bed.

It was nice and dark out right now. The moon was big and round and glowing, and the sky was big and black and blue, and there was a sprinkling of stars in the sky.

I was driving over to Lydia's place now. Even though Lydia's killer and Grimm must not know that I was looking into Lydia's death--if Lydia's death had something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal--and even though Lydia *was* dead--I still wanted to search Lydia's place while it was

nice and dark out, and while no one would see me get into her place and search it.

Lydia's place was on Maple Street. It was an apartment.

I was driving away from her place now. I had searched it. But I hadn't found anything there that could tell me what was going on. The only thing I *did* find there was the same kind of message that Stephanie had left on Lydia's answering machine at home that she had left on Lydia's answering machine at work. That Stephanie had told Lydia that she had found out something about Grimm that looks illegal and that she was going to find out what it was that was illegal that Grimm was up to and that she had advised Lydia not to go out with Grimm again the next time she goes down to Long Beach. Now I looked at my watch. Eleven forty nine. I was getting hungry, so I looked around for a good place to eat at.

Denny's was on Meridian Street. It was a nice twenty four hour restaurant. I had eaten

there before. It was another good place I liked to eat.

I was here at Denny's now. Sitting at the counter and eating a cheeseburger and fries and washing them down with coffee and a chocolate shake.

I felt better after I had eaten. Then I left a nice tip on the counter and paid the check and left Denny's and went home and turned in. Tomorrow I could continue the investigation.

CHAPTER III

The next day, I was here at my office and got on my computer so I could re-read the newspaper story of Lydia's death. I did want to re-read it. But the story didn't tell me anything more than what I had already read: all the story told me was that someone had found Lydia's body in an alley morning and had called the police. Lydia had been shot once through the head, and all of her money had been taken out of her wallet. The person who had killed and robbed Lydia must have worn gloves. There were no fingerprints on Lydia's purse or wallet, and there were no signs of a struggle, which meant that the killer must have killed and robbed Lydia without putting up a fight. And, of course, no one had seen or heard the killer kill Lydia and rob her. Then I printed out this information and put it in the file on the

Hollister combination case. For the record. Then I looked at my watch. Ten eleven.

I had time go over to police headquarters and look at the file on Lydia's robbery and murder. Maybe something in that would tell me something. So I put the file on the Hollister combination case into the filing cabinet and locked up the cabinet, and then I called police headquarters and told Craig Pritchard I'd like to see the file on Lydia's robbery and murder, that Belinda had hired me to look into Lydia's alleged robbery and murder and help Stephanie find out if Grimm were up to something illegal, and then we hung up, and then I turned the answering machine on and locked up the office and went over to police headquarters and looked at the file on Lydia's robbery and murder. But that didn't tell me anymore than what I already knew. I also told Craig what I had done after I had had my interview with Belinda and Peter and what I had found at Lydia's place. Then Craig and I

came to the conclusion that it looked like it was a dead end here in Bellingham on the investigation. That it looked like the answer wasn't here in Bellingham. That it looked like the answer was down there in Long Beach--if Lydia's death had something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal. Then I left police headquarters and got into my car and took my cell phone out of my pocket and called Belinda at work and requested a meeting with her and Peter. Then we decided on where and when we could meet, and then we hung up, and then I put my cell phone back into my pocket. Then I looked at my watch. Twelve noon. Exactly.

I had more than enough time to get something to eat and go back to the office and write a statement on what I found in the police file on Lydia's robbery and murder, and my discussion with Craig on what I had done so far in the investigation. My appointment with Belinda and Peter was at

three o'clock this afternoon. So I started up the car and pulled out of the police department parking lot and turned onto the street and drove down it and looked around for a good place to eat at.

The Teriyaki Bar was in downtown Bellingham. It was a nice Oriental restaurant. I had eaten there before. I liked the place. It was another good place for me to eat at.

I was here at the Teriyaki Bar now. Sitting at a table and eating spicy chicken and washing it down with Coke.

I felt better after I had eaten. Then I left the Teriyaki Bar and went back to the office and typed my statement of what I had read in the police file of Lydia's robbery and murder, and my discussion with Craig on what I had discovered so far in the investigation. After that, I put the statement into *my* file on the Hollister combination case, and then I turned the computer off and put the file back into the filing cabinet and

locked up the cabinet, and then I looked at my watch. One seventeen.

There wasn't anything else about the investigation I could do until I keep my appointment with Belinda and Peter. So I sat back down behind my desk and took the remote control out of the top drawer of my desk and turned on the TV and watched TV until it was time for me to go to my meeting with Belinda and Peter.

I was here at Consolidated Industries now. Inside Peter's office and sitting in front of Peter's desk while Peter himself was sitting behind his desk, and Belinda was sitting on one side of the desk. I told them what I had discovered in my investigation so far. "And because of this," I said after I had finished. "I'm going to have to continue the investigation down in Long Beach *and* help Stephanie try to find out if Grimm is up to something illegal."

"Then I can go ahead and call Stephanie and tell her you're going down to Long

Beach and continue the investigation and help her try to find out if Grimm is up to something illegal?" Belinda asked me.

"Yes, you can. Also tell her she can continue trying to find out if Grimm is up to something illegal until I get down there. There's no reason for her not to continue trying to find out if Grimm is up to something illegal until I get down there. Also: she shouldn't tell anyone she'll be working with a private investigator on this until I get down there and talk to her. And if she needs to talk to me about Grimm's being up to something illegal or about Lydia's death having something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal or both before I get down there, give her my phone numbers here in Bellingham. You do know them, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Good. Well. If there isn't anything else, I'll get ready for my trip to Long Beach."

Belinda and Peter said there wasn't. Then I stood up and shook hands with Peter, and Belinda stood up and hugged me, and I hugged her back, and then the both of them wished me luck, and I thanked them for saying that. And then I left and looked at my watch. Three fifty eight. I had time to go back to my office and make my hotel and airplane and car rental reservations for Long Beach.

I was here at my office now. I checked my answering machine, but I didn't get any new messages. Then I erased the message I had gotten from Belinda. I wasn't going to keep it anymore. Then I got behind my desk and sat down behind it and got on the phone and made my hotel and airplane and car rental reservations for Long Beach. Then I hung up. After that, I looked at my watch. Four thirteen.

I had time to go out to the airport and get my airplane ticket. I did. Then I looked at my watch again. Four thirty six.

There wasn't anything else about my trip I could do today. So I left the airport and looked around for a good place to have dinner at. I was getting hungry.

McDonald's was on Telegraph Road. I had eaten there before. I liked the place. It was another good place I ate at.

I was here at McDonald's now. Sitting at a table and eating a Big Mac and washing it down with Coke and a chocolate shake. I also kept track of time. I was going to have to. Two days from now I was going to have to pack a bag, and the day after that, I was going to go out to the airport and get on the plane to Long Beach. My plane was going to go to Long Beach four days from now. For those first two days I could do whatever I wanted to do. There wasn't anything else about my trip I could do until I do pack my bag and go out to the airport and get on the plane to Long Beach.

I also thought about the situation. It was a good thing that someone who lived down

in Long Beach was going to help me out on the Hollister combination case. Because I had never been to Long Beach before. And because of this, I was going to need help on this as well as I was going to help Stephanie out on what *she* was doing in the investigation.

I felt better after I had eaten. Then I left McDonald's and went home. For the next two days I stayed in. No sense going over to the office and wait for business to come my way since I wasn't going to be here in Bellingham to go to the office and wait for business to come my way. And on the third day I packed my bag. And on the fourth day I took a taxi out to the airport, and then I got on the plane to Long Beach, and then, a few minutes later, the plane took off.

CHAPTER IV

I looked out the porthole of the plane as we were reaching Long Beach. Long Beach, at eleven fifty three in the afternoon, looked stimulating.

We reached Long Beach, and the plane came down on the runway of the airport so smoothly that we felt the wheels of the plane touch the ground without a jostle.

When the plane came to a complete stop in front of the terminal of the airport, we collected our luggage and walked out of the plane. As we walked over to the terminal to go into it, I looked all around me. Long Beach from here on the ground at a few minutes after noon looked breezy. We went into the terminal, and I walked over to the car rental agency and signed for the car I had ordered and was given the keys to the car and was told where in the airport the car

was. I also asked the girl for a map of Long Beach since I had never been here before, and she gave it to me, and then I asked her how I could get to my hotel, and she told me. After that, I left the car rental agency and went out to where my car was and put my luggage into the trunk of the burnt orange Cougar. Then I got into the car and started it up, and then I left the airport and turned onto the street and drove over to my hotel.

The Beach Plaza Hotel was in downtown Long Beach on Ocean Boulevard.

I made the turn and drove into the parking lot and parked my car in front of the office and got out of the car and went into the office and registered. After that I was given the key to my room, and then I got back into my car and drove over to the parking lot next to my room, and then I parked the car here and retrieved my luggage from the trunk of my car and went

into my room and unpacked. After that I looked at my watch. Twelve thirteen.

I decided to see Stephanie tomorrow. What I should do today is sleep off the jet lag. I was going to need to. Then get something to eat. But first I was going to get undressed and take a shower. I did that. Then I went back into my room and set the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up at later tonight, and then I put my gun underneath the pillow and got into bed and went to sleep.

The alarm clocked buzzed. I stirred, then came awake. Then I turned the alarm clock off and looked at the time. The clock told me it was the time I had wanted to get up at. Then I got out of bed and went into the bathroom and shaved and showered. Then I went back into the bedroom and got dressed. Then I left my room and got into my car and drove over to the office and went into the office and asked the girl here what was a good place to eat at and how get there.

She told me. Then I thanked her and left the office and got back into my car and drove over to that place to eat at.

As I drove over to that place, I looked out to where the beach was. I saw people sun bathing and eating and swimming. I liked what I saw. Maybe I'd be lucky and put in some quality recreational time while I was here.

Hof's Hut wasn't far from the Beach Plaza. I was sitting at the window and eating a huge cheeseburger and fries and washing them down with Coke and coffee.

I felt better after I had eaten. The meal and my sleeping off the jet lag had helped. Then I left a nice tip on the table and paid the check and left the restaurant and got into my car and looked at my watch. Nine o'clock.

I had some time to kill, so I thought I'd take a look around Long Beach. And did. I was fascinated by what I saw. It was quite a place.

It was about eleven o'clock when I got back to the Beach Plaza.

Here inside my room, I set the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up at tomorrow morning, and then I got undressed and went into the bathroom and took a shower. Then I went back into the bedroom and put my gun underneath the pillow, and then I got into bed and went to sleep.

The next morning, I drove over to Stephanie's place. I had gotten up at the time I had wanted to get up and had shaved and had gotten dressed and had had breakfast at Hof's Hut. Then I had called Stephanie and had made an appointment with her. Now I arrived at Stephanie's place. It was here on Ocean Boulevard, and then I parked my car across the street from her apartment, and then I got out of my car and locked it, and then I ran across and went into the apartment building and took the elevator up to Stephanie's place.

When I reached Stephanie's place, I knocked on the door.

The door opened, and standing the apartment was a girl.

She was tall, slender, had long, thick sandy hair, brown eyes, a creamy tan complexion, a straight nose, thin beige lips, and she was wearing a brown and white print dress and shiny white high heel shoes.

"Hello," I said. "You must be Stephanie Loren."

"I am," she said.

"I'm Frank Hurley--"

"Oh, yes. Mr. Hurley,"

Then Stephanie and I shook hands. Her grip was firm for a woman.

"Come in." she then said to me.

"Thank you," Then I came in and she closed the door. Then I took my private investigator's license out of my pocket and showed it to her. She looked at it and nodded. "Oh, yes," she then said. "Belinda

told me you are a private investigator, that you look into anything secret or illegal."

"That's right. I do," I said. "And Belinda told me you're a paralegal."

"That's right. I am. Would you like some coffee?"

"All right."

"How do you take it?"

"Black, please."

"I'll be right back. Just make yourself comfortable." Then she left the room and went into the kitchen, and I put my private investigator's license back into my pocket. Her getting the coffee gave me the chance to look over the room. I sat down on the long comfortable brown and white print couch and looked around. The living room was big and wide and spacious and painted in French vanilla. In front of the couch was a tan colored coffee table. The carpet was brown. Opposite the couch and the coffee table, and against the walls, were black cabinets with various things of interest on

them, and the TV and DVD player and turntable and a computer, and decorating all of the walls of the room were various pictures and posters of interest. On the left side of the room was a tan colored table with matching chairs.

Stephanie came back into the room with two cups of coffee and sat down beside me and gave me *my* cup of coffee, and then the both of us sipped our coffee.

"Belinda told me why she hired you," Stephanie told me. "She wants you to find out if Lydia's death has something to do with Harold Grimm's being up something illegal, and to help me find out what it is that's illegal that Grimm is up to."

"That's right," I confirmed.

"She also told me that you don't want me to tell anyone that I'll be working with a private investigator on this until you come down here to Long Beach and talk to me about this."

"That's right."

"Well, I haven't told anyone that I'll be working with a private investigator on this."

"Good. Depending upon what we find out or what we already know or both, we may have to go undercover on this."

"I understand. Belinda also told me that you wanted to start the investigation up in Bellingham and why you wanted to start the investigation up in Bellingham." Then Stephanie told me what Belinda had told her about what I had discovered up in Bellingham. "So it looks like it's like a dead end in Bellingham," she said after she had finished.

"That's right," I confirmed. "But it may be a live end here in Long Beach. A live end is a word I made up. A live end is the opposite of a dead end."

"Yes. I think I figured it out."

I smiled. "So it looks like the answer is here in Long Beach and not up in Bellingham. But there's one thing about this that I don't understand: why was Lydia killed

up in Bellingham and not here in Long Beach?" Then I told Stephanie what I thought about that.

"Which means that she was supposed to die here in Long Beach and not up in Bellingham," Stephanie said after I had finished.

"That's right. What have *you* found out so far?"

"Well, Belinda told me that she told you that while Lydia was here in Long Beach on vacation, she visited me and met and went out with Grimm."

"That's right."

"Well, shortly before Lydia's vacation was over, and shortly after she went back up to Bellingham, I was at a party one night. I met Grimm at that party and we talked. And then I told him that I had to go to the bathroom. Then I went to the bathroom. After I went to the bathroom, I was going back into the living room. I was in the hall at that time. Then I heard this conversation

inside one of the rooms inside the hall. One man was talking to another. The door to that room was closed at that time. But I heard Grimm talking to the other man inside that room. I recognized his voice. The conversation went like this: *"Since the serial number has been filed off of it, the police won't be able to trace it to you if you lose it or if it's stolen."* But that's all I heard. Then I didn't hear them talking anymore. And then I heard footsteps walking over to the door. It sounded like Grimm and the other person were going to leave the room. Then I left the hall so Grimm and the other person wouldn't see me standing in the hall and went back into the living room, pretending I didn't overhear what it was that Grimm and the other person were talking about, and then I saw Grimm come into the living room and walk over to me, but I didn't see the other person he had been talking to. Either he went somewhere else inside the house to go talk to someone else, or he left the house.

And Grimm and I continued talking. Then the next day, I called Lydia to tell her I had found out something about Grimm, something that looked illegal, and that I was going to look into it and that I advised Lydia not to go out with Grimm again the next time she comes down here to Long Beach. But she wasn't there. So I left a message on her answering machine. At work and at home. But I never heard from her."

"Probably because she died before she got your message."

"Yeah. Then I started trying to find out about this something about Grimm, this something that looked illegal."

"Did you find anything?"

Stephanie shook her head. Then she spoke to me: "I ran a check on him. But there's nothing illegal about what he's doing. And it doesn't tell me if it has to do with what I overheard at that party."

"Probably because Grimm's not going to keep that kind of information hanging

around where someone could find it. If he did, and someone found it, he'd get into a lot of trouble. Probably be arrested. I ran a check on Grimm, too, while I was up in Bellingham. And I found out the same things about him that *you* did. He's clean."

"Well, there's something about his work that I don't understand: he is in the business of finding things that people want? Well, if he *is* in the business of finding things that people want, then why isn't there a warehouse he goes to get the things that people want?"

"Probably because knowing where that warehouse is isn't important. It wouldn't be uncommon for a salesman to get the something the client wants from the warehouse and go over to his client's place and give the client what it is the client wants. Or mail the something to the client. Or meet the client somewhere and give the client what the client wants . . . Or maybe what it is that Grimm is giving the client is

something stolen. And the something stolen is kept in a warehouse. Or maybe the something stolen is made to look different before it's sold to and given to the client--turning a hot item into a cold item."

Stephanie thought about that. Then she spoke: "Yeah."

"Yeah," I said. "How long was Lydia's vacation?"

"Two weeks,"

I thought about that. Then I spoke: "A lot could have happened in two weeks."

"Yeah."

"Did she say or do anything to do indicate she had something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal?"

"No, she didn't."

"Which means that she didn't know that Grimm is up to something illegal, or she does, but she hasn't told anyone, not even Grimm himself, or she *has* told Grimm and no one else she knows he's up to something, or it's something else. Did Lydia do anything

else on her vacation that would have to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal?"

"No, she didn't. All she did while she was here in Long Beach on vacation was visit me and go out with Grimm. She had told me what she knew about Grimm, that he was a nice guy, and that he's in the business of finding things that people want, but that's all she told me."

"Did she spend a lot of time with Grimm?"

"Yes, she did. As a matter of fact, she spent more time going out with him than she did visiting me."

"I see. Well, there's nothing wrong with that. Probably because she got interested in him. Or vice versa. Or both. And I imagine nothing out of the ordinary that would have to do with Lydia's having something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal happened shortly before Lydia's vacation

was over, and when she was going back to Bellingham?"

"That's right. I didn't see or hear anything out of the ordinary that would have to do with Lydia's having something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal. The last time I saw her was when she was leaving my place. She had been staying at my place while she had been here in Long Beach. We said good-bye to each other at the door, and then she left, and I closed the door and went back to watching TV."

"Did she drive a rented car to the airport as well as she drove a rented car while she was here in Long Beach, or did she take a taxi to the airport?"

""She drove a rented car to the airport as well as she drove a rented car while she was here in Long Beach."

"Which means that she must have gotten into the rented car after she left your place and drove over to the airport and turned in

the rented car and got on the plane to Bellingham."

"Yeah."

"And she didn't say or do anything out of the ordinary that would have to do with her having something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal?"

"No. She didn't."

"Well, maybe nothing out of the ordinary that had to do with her having something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal *had* happened, or maybe something out of the ordinary that had to do with her having something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal *did* happened, but Grimm or Lydia or someone else made it look like nothing out of the ordinary that had to do with Lydia's having something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal happened--a cover up--a covert operation."

"Well, if it *were* a cover up, or if it *were* a covert operation, then whoever it was that

covered it up did a good job at covering it up. *I* wouldn't have suspected anything."

"That's the whole idea: to make sure that no one suspects it. Have you looked any further into the possibility of Grimm's being up to something illegal?"

"I was going to, but then I got that phone call from Belinda telling me she hired you to find out if Lydia's death has something to do with Grimm's being up to something illegal, *and* to help me find out if Grimm *is* up to something illegal, *and* what I could do until you get down here, *and*, what *you* wanted to do up in Bellingham before you come down here to Long Beach, *and*, that you didn't want me to tell anyone that I'll be working with a private investigator on this. After I got that phone call from Belinda, and before you got down here to Long Beach, I was thinking about what else I could do in the investigation."

"I see. But you haven't done anything else you could do in the investigation?"

"No, I haven't. I was still thinking about what else I could do in the investigation."

"I see. Well, since I'm here now, I think we can put our heads together and come up with a way to continue finding out what we need to know."

There weren't any more questions that Stephanie and I needed to ask each other, so we put our heads together so we could come up with a way to continue finding out what we needed to know.

CHAPTER V

It was one twenty six in the morning here in Seal Beach. The sky here in Seal Beach was big and black and blue, and with a streak of clouds in the sky, and with a sprinkling of stars in the sky, and the moon was big and round and glowing like a well-polished piece of platinum.

Grimm's place here in Seal Beach was an apartment. As quickly and silently as I could, I took my gloves out of my pocket and put them on, and then I picked the lock of the front door of his place, and then I opened the door just enough to look inside it. It was dark inside. Then, I tiptoed into the apartment and closed and locked the door behind me as quickly and silently as I could. Then, I took my penlight out of my pocket and turned it on and shot the light into the room and looked around. The room was I

standing in was the living room. But this wasn't the room I wanted to be in. Instead, the room I wanted to be in now was Grimm's room. So I could render him unconscious and tap his cell phone and bug his place and tap his landline phone. So I looked around for Grimm's room. And I found it. I looked inside his room. He *was* in bed. Then, I took the knockout drops out of my pocket, and then, I tip toed over to him, and then, I held the bottle of the knockout drops underneath the nostrils of Grimm's nose, and then it happened: Grimm inhaled the knockout drops, and then he passed out. Now he was out cold. And he was going to be out cold for hours. Then I put the bottle of the knockout drops back into my pocket, and then I looked for Grimm's cell phone. I found it. It was on one of his bedside tables. I tapped it. Then I left his room and looked around for a good place to bug his place. I found it. It was inside the living room: the caramel colored coffee table. I put the bug underneath the

coffee table. Then I looked for and found Grimm's landline phone and tapped that. It was here in his big, wide spacious off white living room on his small caramel colored table next to his caramel colored leather recliner easy chair. Then I searched the living room and the rest of Grimm's place. Then I left Grimm's place the same way I had entered it and closed and locked the door as quickly and silently as I could. Then I went downstairs and got into my car and started it up and drove away without speeding so I won't arouse suspicion.

I was here at a twenty four hour coffee shop now. Sitting at the counter and sipping coffee while I waited for the meal I had ordered to come; I also thought about what I had discovered at Grimm's place: nothing. There wasn't anything at Grimm's place that could tell Stephanie and me what we needed to know. Which meant that Grimm had something there at his place that could tell Stephanie and me what we needed to know,

but he hid it real well at his place, or he hid it somewhere else. Or he had nothing that could tell Stephanie and me what we needed to know.

My meal came, and then I dug right into: a hot meat loaf sandwich. And I washed it down with more coffee.

I felt better after I had eaten. Then I left a nice tip on the table and paid the check and left the restaurant and went back to my hotel and turned in. There wasn't anything else about my looking into the Hollister combination case that I could do this morning.

The next day, I was here at Stephanie's place. I told Stephanie what I had done at Grimm's place and what I had discovered there while she and I sat on the couch and sipped coffee. Then I got out my cell phone and called Grimm and told him who I was and that I'd like to talk to him about something and that I'd like to make an

appointment with him to talk to him about this something.

"What's it about?" Grimm asked me.

"Well, I'd rather tell you about it when we meet," I told him. "It's private, and it could get lengthy,"

"I see. Well, let me check my calendar."

"All right,"

A few seconds later, Grimm came back on: "Mr. Hurley?"

"Yes?"

"You can see me this afternoon at two o'clock here at my place."

"All right."

"Do you know how to get to my place?"

"No, I don't," I lied. I had to. I had to pretend I had never been to his place.

Then Grimm told me how to get to his place and I wrote the directions down in my notebook. Then I thanked Grimm and told him I'll be at his place this afternoon at two o'clock.

"Fine," he said. Then he hung up.

So did I. Then I spoke to Stephanie: "I have an appointment with Grimm this afternoon at two o'clock at his place. And after I talk to him, it'll be interested to see what happens."

At one fifty three, I pulled up to the curb in front of the apartment building that Grimm lived in and parked my car here. Then I got out of the car and locked it, and then I went into the building and came to Grimm's apartment and knocked on the door.

The door opened.

Standing inside the living room was Grimm.

He was tall, thin, had salt and pepper hair, a matching mustache splitting his tanned and leathery face in two, green eyes, broad shoulders, and he was wearing a silver gray suit, a white shirt, no tie, open collar, and black leather shoes.

"Yes?" he said.

"Mr. Harold Grimm?" I said.

"Yes. I'm Harold Grimm."

"I'm Frank Hurley. We talked on the phone this morning?"

"Oh, yes. Won't you come in."

"Thank you," I did and Grimm closed the door. Then I took my private investigator's license out of my pocket and showed it to Grimm. Grimm looked at it. Then he looked at me and spoke to me: "You're a private investigator."

"That's right," I confirmed.

"And you're from Washington State." The private investigator's license I showed him did say it was a Washington State private investigator's license.

"That's right."

"Where in Washington State are you from?"

"Bellingham."

"I see. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"All right."

"How do you take it?"

"Black, please."

"I'll be right back with it. Won't you sit down?"

"All right."

Then Grimm left the living room and I went into the living room and sat down on the long caramel colored leather couch and looked all around me. The walls were pale yellow, and the carpet was pale green. On the walls were various paintings and pictures of interest. Against one of the walls were a turntable and a maple cabinet and the TV and VCR and DVD player, and against another wall was a computer.

Grimm came back into the living room with two cups of coffee.

Grimm was sitting in his recliner chair now, sipping *his* coffee, while I sipped *my* coffee.

"So what brings you here to southern California, Mr. Hurley?" Grimm asked me.

"A missing person," I told him. "Consolidated Industries is a private industry up in Bellingham. I've been hired by

Consolidated Industries to find one of their employees: a Ms Lydia Hollister. She's missing. She went back to Bellingham after she finished taking her vacation in Long Beach, California, and then she went back to work, and then a few days, later, she disappeared. Her friends at work wondered why she didn't show up at work when they called her place, but there was no answer, and then they went over to her place, but she wasn't there. They asked her next door neighbors where she was, but they said they didn't know. Then they worried. Then they told the police she was gone, and then the police tried to find her, but they couldn't find her, but they're still looking. And then they hired me to help the police find her."

"I see," Grimm said. "Well, I'm sorry to hear she's missing. I imagine you started looking for her in Bellingham?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't find her there, and so you came down here to California to find her here?"

"That's right. First I tried to find Ms Hollister up in Bellingham. But I couldn't find her up there. Then her friends told me that she was on vacation down in Long Beach before she went back up to Bellingham. Maybe someone in Long Beach would know something about her disappearance. They told me that while she *was* in Long Beach, she met you. Maybe *you* know something about her disappearance."

Grimm shook his head. "No. I'm afraid not," he then said. "I met her while she was down in Long Beach, and we went out, and then she went back to Bellingham. But that was all."

"I see. Would you know anyone else who might know about Lydia's disappearance while she was in Long Beach?"

"No, I'm afraid not. I wish I did, though."

"Well, if you can think of anything else that could tell me where I can find her, let me know." Then I told Grimm where I was staying. I didn't want to give him my card. Since my cell phone number and my business landline phone number were on it. Because Grimm was the one that Stephanie and I were investigating.

"All right."

Then I stood up and spoke to Grimm: "Well, thanks for letting me talk to you about Lydia Hollister, Mr. Grimm."

Grimm stood up, too, and spoke to me: "You're welcome, Mr. Hurley. I wish I did know more so I could tell you about Lydia's disappearance. Gee, this is quite a shock. Her, missing."

"Yes. It is."

"Well, I hope you find her."

"I hope so, too,"

Then Grimm and I shook hands, and then I thanked him for the coffee, and then

Grimm showed me to the door, and I walked out of it, and he closed it.

As I was leaving the apartment building to go to my car and go back to Stephanie's place, I took out of my pocket the radio to the tap I had put inside Grimm's landline phone and turned it on and put it to my ear and listened. I heard some dialing. When I got to my car, I unlocked it and got into it, and then I put the radio on the front seat of the car, and then I started up the car and pulled away from the curb so I could go back to Stephanie's place.

I was driving over to Stephanie's place now. I also continued listening to the radio to the tap I had put inside Grimm's landline phone. Then, I heard someone pick up the phone. "Hello," the voice said. "Val Aames."

"Hello," Grimm said. "Val? It's Harold."

"Harold. How are you doing?"

Then Grimm told this Aames about the conversation he had had with me about Lydia's disappearance."

"Lydia Hollister missing?" Aames wondered after Grimm had finished.

"That's right," Grimm said.

"Well, that can't be. Lydia Hollister is dead. And you know where her body is."

"Yes, I do."

"And you know what Jake had Kathy Barlow do, and you know what Jake did after Kathy Barlow got to Bellingham."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, then this Frank Hurley must not know about the news of Lydia Hollister's death in Bellingham, and his client must not know about the news of Lydia Hollister's death in Bellingham, and maybe some other people don't know about the news of Lydia Hollister's death in Bellingham, or it's something else."

"What do we do?"

"*You* continue doing what *you're* doing, and *I'll* continue doing what *I'm* doing. I'll also tell Jake about what this Frank Hurley told you. He'll take care of it."

"All right."

"Anything else, Harold?"

"No. That's it."

"Thanks for telling me about this talk you had with Hurley."

"You're welcome. Bye."

"Bye."

Then Grimm and Aames hung up.

I also had a pocket size device, separate from the radio to the tap I had put inside Grimm's landline phone, that had recorded the phone conversation that Grimm and Aames had had about Grimm's conversation with me about Lydia's disappearance. It also recorded the phone number of the person that Grimm had called and had talked to about Grimm's conversation with Aames about Grimm's conversation with me about Lydia's disappearance.

That device was here at Stephanie's place. And she had heard everything that Grimm and Aames had talked about. Now

she was on the computer, finding out what she can about Aames and Kathy Barlow.

I was here at Stephanie's place now. Sitting on the couch with her, and the both of us were sipping coffee.

"I found out what I could about Val Aames and Kathy Barlow," Stephanie told me. "Aames is a gunsmith. He also buys and sells guns as well as he makes guns. He lives in Seal Beach. He's lived in Seal Beach all of his life. No criminal record. Kathy Barlow lives in Seal Beach, and she does correspondence work for a fishery in Seal Beach. She used to live in the Dalls, Oregon. No criminal record. And she looks exactly like Lydia. But right now, she's missing."

"She's what?!" I exclaimed.

"That's right. She's missing. And she's been missing for a long time. She disappeared sometime during Lydia's vacation here in Long Beach. No one's seen her, and she didn't show up for work, and so her friends called the police and reported

her missing. The police tried to find Kathy, but they couldn't. But they're still trying to find her."

"I see. Yet this Aames told Grimm that this Jake had Kathy Barlow do whatever it was that this Jake had her do, and then Aames told Grimm that this Jake had done what he had to do after Kathy Barlow went to Bellingham. And Lydia Hollister is dead. Although Aames and Grimm didn't say where Lydia's body is. Either it's somewhere here in California, or it's somewhere else."

"Yeah,"

Then, it came to me. Then, I spoke: "What if Lydia were killed for some reason while she was here in Long Beach, then her body was disposed of somewhere here in California or somewhere else, and then, Aames and Grimm and Jake knew or found out that Kathy Barlow looked exactly like Lydia, and so they came up with an idea to remove all suspicion from themselves about Lydia's murder by having this Kathy Barlow

impersonate Lydia and go to Bellingham, and after Kathy gets to Bellingham, Jake kills Kathy and makes Kathy look like Lydia was the victim of robbery and murder so there won't be an investigation of her death?"

"Of course. Makes sense. They go through a lot of trouble to make it look like Lydia died up in Bellingham instead of somewhere down here in California."

"That's right. And Jake must have followed Kathy up to Bellingham without her seeing his doing it, and then, after they got to Bellingham, Jake killed Kathy, and made her look like Lydia was the victim of robbery and murder, and then he came back here to California after he finished killing Kathy and making Lydia look like she was the victim of robbery and murder."

"Yeah."

"And Grimm and Aames, or one of them, had Jake carry out this plan to make it look like Lydia died up in Bellingham."

"Yeah."

"Yeah. There is that possibility. It would explain Lydia's death and Kathy's disappearance. So what we'll need to do is look into this possibility and investigate Aames and Grimm and Kathy Barlow."

"Yeah. And maybe we'll find out about this Jake, too, whoever *he* is. If he's going to look into the conversation you had with Grimm about Lydia's disappearance, then he'll show up."

"Of course."

"So it looks like Grimm *is* up to something illegal, and it *does* look like Lydia's death has something to do with it."

"That's right. And when I asked Grimm if he knew anyone else who might know about Lydia's disappearance while she was in Long Beach, he said he didn't know. Well, that made sense. If other people were in on Grimm's being up to something illegal, and they knew about Lydia's disappearance, too, and Grimm told me who they are, he'd get them into trouble. I'd investigate them."

"Of course. So it looks like the answer's here in California."

"Yeah. It looks like the live end is here in California."

CHAPTER VI

The next day, I was here in Seal Beach. I found and snuck into Kathy Barlow's place. Kathy lived in an apartment. I searched her place and tapped her landline phone and bugged her place. Even though it looked like no one who would be in on Grimm's being up to something illegal was going to go over to Kathy's place for some reason that had to do with the conversation I had had with Grimm about Lydia's disappearance, I wanted to be prepared to hear anything that might happen at Kathy's place that would have to do with the conversation I had had with Grimm about Lydia's disappearance.

I snuck out of Kathy's place and left it. I hadn't found anything inside Kathy's place that could tell Stephanie and me what we needed to know. Now I was driving over to

Val Aames's place so I could search that and bug it and tap his landline phone.

Aames's place was a house. It was a big white one story house with a dark blue gray roof and a matching garage. I snuck into it and looked around. Then I planted a bug inside his place, and then I tapped his landline phone. Then I snuck out of his place and left his place. I hadn't found anything inside his place that could tell me what Stephanie and I needed to know. Now I was driving over to Aames's place of business so I could put that place under surveillance. And maybe follow and watch Aames and get into Aames's place of business at the first opportunity to search it and tap the landline phone there, too.

Aames's place of business was on Pacific Coast Highway. Somewhere between Seal Beach and Huntington Beach, California. There was a light brown sign on the front while wall of the building that proudly said that Aames was a gunsmith.

When I came to Aames's gunsmith shop, I drove down the street several yards away from it and parked my car across the street from it. Then I watched the place. I also noticed the area I was in. I found it interesting. It looked like something out of those Beach Party movies that Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon were in.

Then I saw Aames put a sign of the door of his gunsmith shop. Quickly I took my binoculars out of my pocket and looked through them at the sign that Aames had put on the door of his gunsmith shop. It said that Aames was going to be back at two this afternoon. I looked at my watch. Noon. Exactly.

I liked this. This meant that he was going to close up the shop so he could go have lunch. It had to be that. And that would give me the opportunity to search and bug Aames's gunsmith shop and tap his landline phone there. I put the binoculars back into the glove compartment and continued

watching Aames's gunsmith shop and waited for Aames himself to leave the shop and go have his lunch.

I saw him leave the place. He was pulling out of the parking lot of his shop and turned onto the street and drive down the street. Going in the opposite direction I had come from. He was driving a green Mustang with a black hard top. I got out of *my* car and locked it, and then I ran across the street, and then I walked into the back of Aames's gunsmith shop and looked around. No one was here. Then I took my gloves out of my pocket and put them on, and then I took my lock pick set out of my pocket and picked the lock of the back door of Aames's gunsmith shop, and then I went into the building and closed the door as quickly and silently as I could. Then I looked all around me. Then I looked for and found his landline phone and tapped it, and then I put a bug underneath the kneehole of his desk. Then I snuck out of the building the same way I had

snuck into it, and then I closed and locked the back door of the place as quickly and silently as I could. Then I took my gloves off and put them into my pocket, and then I walked out from behind the building and ran across the street to go back to my car. I hadn't found anything at Aames's gunsmith shop that could tell Stephanie and me what we needed to know.

When I reached my car, I unlocked it and got into it, and then I looked at my watch. Twelve thirty-one.

It was going to be an hour and half before Aames goes back to work. This was going to give me more than enough for me to go somewhere and get something to eat. I *was* getting hungry. So I started up the car and pulled away from the curb and drove down the street and looked around for a good place to eat at.

I found a good place to eat at: Duke's. It was on Pacific Coast Highway and in Huntington Beach.

I was here inside Duke's now. Sitting at a table next to the window and eating a nice juicy cheeseburger and fries and washing them down with beer and looking out the window. I saw some people--both men and women--dive into the water and swim away from shore, and then, when they saw a wave come in, they swam with the wave, all the way up to shore. I liked what I saw. And hopefully I'll be able to do this while I'm here in California.

I felt better after I had eaten. Then I looked at my watch. Twelve thirty-six.

I still had time before I go back to Aames's gunsmith shop and put it under surveillance. So I ordered some chocolate ice cream and some coffee. I wasn't going to like drinking coffee from here in on. I'd rather have another beer. But for the sake of the job, I was going to have to remain sober. I also kept track of time.

I took my time eating the ice cream and sipping the coffee, though. And I continued

looking out the window at what some of the men and women were doing at the beach. They were still swimming away from shore and then swimming with a wave that came in and all the way up to shore.

At twelve forty-seven, I left a nice tip on the table, and then I paid the check and left Duke's, and then I went over to a store and bought some sandwiches and Coke in case I get hungry while I'm on a stake out, and then I went back to Aames's gunsmith shop. I wanted to get back to his gunsmith shop at least one hour before he goes back to work.

I arrived here at the gunsmith shop at one fourteen, and then I parked my car a few yards away from it on the same side of the street the shop was on, and then I took out of my pocket the radio to the bug I had put inside Aames's gunsmith shop and turned it on, and then I put it on the front seat of my car, and then I took out of my pocket the radio to the tap I had put inside Aames's landline phone and turned *it* on, and then I

put *it* on the front seat of my car. Now I was ready to listen in on Aames's gunsmith shop and his landline phone there. Even though I had gotten back here to the gunsmith shop at least one hour before Aames did.

That hour went by. Then, I saw Aames come back to the gunsmith shop and turn into the parking lot of his gunsmith shop and drive behind it. Then, a few minutes later, I saw him remove the sign from his door and closed the door. After that, I continued watching the place.

Twelve minutes later, I heard Aames's landline phone ring.

"Hello," Aames said when he picked up the receiver. "Val Aames."

"Hello," a male voice said. "Val? It's Jake Garner."

"Jake. How are you doin'?"

"Fine. You?"

"Fine."

"I found out what I could about Frank Hurley. He is from Bellingham, Washington,

and he is a licensed private investigator, and he looks into anything secret or illegal."

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah,"

"So he looks into anything secret or illegal. Well, his client must think there's something secret or illegal about Lydia Hollister's disappearance or both and wants Hurley to look into it as well as find Lydia Hollister."

"Yeah. There is that possibility."

"But you're going to make sure he doesn't find out if there *is* something secret or illegal or both about Lydia Hollister's disappearance. We don't want him to find out what we're doing."

"No, we don't. I'll do what you say."

"Good."

"I haven't been able to get into his hotel room and search it. The lock on the door is electronic. It can only be opened with an electronic key card. And there are a lot of

people driving to and from his hotel and walking in and out of his hotel."

"Well, don't worry about it. You can improvise on finding out what we need to know about Hurley by finding him and following him wherever he goes and watching whatever he does, *and*, if you can, search his car."

"I'll do that."

"Good. Anything else, Jake?"

"No. That's it."

"All right. I gotta get back to work. And thanks for telling me what you found out about Hurley so far."

"You're welcome, Val."

"Bye,"

"Bye,"

Then they hung up.

Another receiver, separate from the radio to the tap I had put inside Aames's landline phone at work, had picked up from the radio to the tap I had put inside Aames's landline phone the conversation that Aames and Jake

had had about what Jake had found out about me and recorded the conversation. The receiver was here at Stephanie's place. Stephanie had heard the conversation that Aames and Jake had had about what Jake had found out about me and had turned the receiver off, and then she got on the computer to find out what she can about Jake.

I continued watching Aames's gunsmith shop. But nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

My cell phone rang. I took it out of my pocket and said hello.

"Hello. Mr. Hurley?" a female said.

"Yes. This is Frank Hurley," I said.

"Mr. Hurley, this is Stephanie Loren. I found out what I could about Jake Garner. He lives in Huntington Beach. He's sort of a salvager for insurance companies. What he does is see if there any valuables that are in a fire or an explosion. He does this kind of work for the insurance companies on a

freelance basis." Then Stephanie told me what Jake looked like and gave me Jake's address, and I wrote this information down in my notebook.

"And when he isn't doing this kind of work," I said after Stephanie had finished, and after I had finished writing down in my notebook what Jake looked like and where he lived. "he does whatever it is he does for Aames."

"How's it going on *your* end of the investigation?"

"Well, except for the phone conversation that Aames and Jake had about what Jake had found out about me, nothing out of the ordinary has happened." Then I told Stephanie what it was I had discovered so far in the investigation today.

"I see," Stephanie said after I had finished. "Well, I hope we make some more progress in the investigation."

"I hope so, too."

"But if Jake is going to find you and keep you from finding out if there *is* something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance, then his doing that could keep us from conducting our investigation."

"I know. That's why we'll have to discontinue our investigation and I find and stop Jake from doing what Aames told him to do. Then we can continue our investigation."

"We could have the police find and stop Jake from doing what Aames told him to do."

"That won't do any good. If we told the police what we're looking into and what we discovered so far, and the police talk to Jake and Aames and Grimm and anyone else who's in on what Jake and Aames and Grimm are doing, Jake and Aames and Grimm and the other people won't say anything. Instead, they'll clam up and brings lawyers into this and move whatever it is they're doing to some other place or destroy it. Because of this, I'm going to have to find

and stop Jake from doing what Aames wants him to do. Then we can continue our investigation and tell the police what we've found out."

"I see."

"You told me where Jake lives. Where is Huntington Beach? I will want to search Jake's place as well as find and stop Jake from doing what Aames told him to do."

Then Stephanie told me. "What do you want *me* to while you search Jake's place and find and stop Jake from doing what Aames wants him to do?"

"Continue doing what you usually do and refrain from doing *your* part in our investigation until I've told you I've found and stopped Jake from doing what Aames wants him to do. There isn't anything else on *your* end of the investigation you can do until you hear from me."

"All right. Good luck,"

"Thank you,"

"You're welcome,"

"Bye,"

"Bye,"

Then we hung up. After that, I put my cell phone back into my pocket and started up my car and made a U turn and drove over to Huntington Beach. Where Jake lived. So I could search his place, then find and stop Jake from doing what Aames had told him to do.

CHAPTER VII

Jake's place was in downtown Huntington Beach. It was an apartment.

I was here inside Jake's place now. I searched it. But I didn't find anything here that could tell Stephanie and me what we needed to know. Then I tapped his landline phone, which was here inside his living room, and then I bugged his place. Then I took a look at the liquor cabinet Jake had here inside his living room to see what I could use to help me keep him from keeping me from finding out if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance. There was more than enough for me to use. Then I looked at my watch. Two thirty-six. I sat down in Jake's big comfortable midnight blue recliner chair and waited for Jake to show up so I could keep him from keeping me from finding out

if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance. I didn't turn the TV on. I didn't want the sound from it to be heard. By Jake himself when he comes back, or by anyone else.

Jake's living room was big and wide and spacious and white, with a midnight blue carpet, and lining some of the walls of the room were shiny black shelves with various things of interest on them, and a turntable and a DVD player, and a videocassette player, and the TV, and the blond wood liquor cabinet, and covering the windows were thick yellow drapes, and next to Jake's recliner chair was a small shiny black table, and his landline phone was on the table.

I heard a car pull up to the curb. I got out of the chair and ran over to the window to peek out of it. I saw Jake get out of his brown Jaguar and lock it.

He was tall, thin, had brown hair, a tapering beefy pale face, a thick build, and he was wearing a brown waist length coat

and matching pants and a light green shirt and black tennis shoes.

Then I saw him come up to his apartment. Quickly I got behind the front door of his place and whipped my gun out of my shoulder holster. Then, I heard him walk over to his place. The footsteps were getting louder and louder with each passing second. Then, I heard the footsteps stop when I heard him come to his place. Then, I heard a key go into the lock of the front door of his place and turn. Then, I saw the door open. And then I saw Jake come into his place and close the door. Although he didn't see me. Then I tapped Jake on the back of his head with the butt of my gun. Then, Jake passed out and fell down to the floor. Then I put my gun back into my shoulder holster and locked the door, and then I picked Jake up and took him over to his recliner chair and put him into it, and then I searched him. He had a cell phone. I took it out of his pocket and put it into *my* pocket. I wasn't going to

let him use it. I don't think he'd call Aames and tell him what had happened to him and where he was, but, just in case. Then, I saw a gun inside Jake's shoulder holster. I took it out of the shoulder holster. It was a Browning 9mm automatic. I liked this. This would add to how I was going to keep Jake from keeping me from finding out if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance. That and the liquor. I put the gun inside Jake's right hand and pressed his fingers on the gun, and then I went over to the liquor cabinet and selected some booze, and then I took the bottle of Whiskey over to Jake and unscrewed the cap, and then I tossed the cap onto the floor, and then I poured some of the Whiskey all over Jake, and some of the Whiskey spilled on the floor, and then I poured some of the Whiskey into Jake's mouth, and then I put the bottle of Whiskey into Jake's other hand and pressed his fingers onto the bottle of Whiskey, and then

I went over to the table next to Jake's recliner chair and took the remote control off of it, and then I turned the TV on, and then I turned up the volume on the TV as loud as I could, and then I put the remote control back on the table, and then I went over to the front door of Jake's place to peek out of it. The coast was clear. No one was around. Then, I stepped out of Jake's place and closed the door as quickly and silently as I could, and then I walked down to my car, which I had parked a few yards away from Jake's place so Jake wouldn't notice it, and when I reached my car, I unlocked it, and then I got into it and started it up and pulled away from the curb and looked around for the nearest pay phone. I didn't want to call the police from my cell phone. I didn't want the call to be traced to me.

I found the nearest pay phone, and then I parked my car next to it and got out of the car, and then I went over to the pay phone and looked around to make sure no one sees

me use my voice changer. No one did. Then I took my voice changer out of my pocket and scooped up the receiver of the pay phone and fed its hungry mouth a couple of quarters, and then I spoke into the voice changer so I could disguise my voice and told the police anonymously that I heard a disturbance at Jake's place. Then I gave the police Jake's address. Then I hung up. After that, I put my voice changer back into my pocket, and then I went back to my car and got into it, and then I started it up and drove back to Jake's place so I could see the results of what I had done.

I was here at Jake's place now. Parked across the street from it and watching it. I must have gotten here early. I didn't see the police here. But then I did. They showed up and parked against the curb in front of Jake's place and got out of their car and went up to Jake's place and knocked on the door. But there was no answer. They knocked on the door again, but again, there was no answer.

Then, one of them turned the knob of the door. Then, the door opened. Then, both policemen went into the apartment. Then, I saw them carry Jake out of his apartment and take him down to the police car and put him into it, and then I saw and heard one of the policemen call headquarters and tell them that they were arresting Jake for being armed and drunk and disturbing the peace and that they were bringing him in, and then I saw the other policemen get into the back seat of the car where Jake was and close the door, and then I saw the other policeman get into the front seat of the car and started it up, and then I saw him and his partner pull away from the curb so they could take Jake down to police headquarters and book him. Then, I started up *my* car and pulled away from the curb so *I* could leave.

When I was far away from Jake's place, I pulled over somewhere and parked my car. Then I took Jake's cell phone out of my pocket and took the battery out of the cell

phone, and then I put both the cell phone and the battery back into my pocket. Now Jake's cell phone was going to ring. Which was what I wanted. Then I took *my* cell phone out of my pocket and called Stephanie and told her I had just kept Jake from preventing me from finding out if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance. Then I told Stephanie that I had also taken Jake's cell phone so he can't call Aames or Grimm or anyone else who was in on whatever it was that Aames and Grimm and Jake were doing and tell them what had happened to him and where he was now. Grimm or Aames or anyone else who was in on whatever it was that Jake and Grimm and Aames were doing couldn't go to the police station and bail Jake out or talk to him. It'd be dangerous for them if they would. They'd expose themselves. Then I told Stephanie that I had taken the battery out of Jake's cell phone so it won't ring. Then I looked at my watch.

Two forty-six. Then I spoke to Stephanie again: "I still have time to go back to Aames's gunsmith shop and continue watching it and follow Aames himself wherever he goes and watch whatever he does after he leaves his gunsmith shop today. So I'm going back there right now to continue watching his gunsmith shop and follow and watch Aames after he leaves the gunsmith shop."

"All right. I imagine you'd like for me to continue being on standby?"

"That would be nice,"

"I'll do that,"

"Great. Thank you."

"You're welcome. Anything else?"

"No. That's it. Bye."

"Bye,"

Then Stephanie and I hung up. Then I put my cell phone back into my pocket, and then I took my gloves off and put them back into my pocket. I wasn't going to need to use them anymore right now. Then, I started up my car and pulled away from the curb so I

could go back to Aames's gunsmith shop and continue watching it and follow Aames himself wherever he goes and watch whatever he does after he leaves the gunsmith shop.

Stephanie hadn't asked me how I had kept Jake from keeping me from finding out if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance. Maybe she thought it wasn't important how I had kept Jake from keeping me from finding out if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance. But if she had asked me how I had kept Jake from keeping me from finding out if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance, and I had told her, she might be shocked or amused. Or, if I had told her how I had kept Jake from keeping me from finding out if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance without her asking me how I kept Jake from keeping me from finding out

if there were something secret or illegal or both about Lydia's disappearance, she might be shocked or amused.

CHAPTER VIII

It was three-fourteen when I got back here to Aames's gunsmith shop and pulled up to the curb on the same side of the street the gunsmith shop was on and a few yards away from the gunsmith shop. Then I parked my car and continued watching the gunsmith shop. But so far, nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

It was five o'clock now, and it was getting dark. Then, I saw Aames put his closed sign on the front door of the gunsmith shop. Then, a few minutes later, I saw Aames pull out of the parking lot of his gunsmith shop and turn onto the road and drive down it. Then, I started up *my* car and pulled away from the curb so I could follow Aames.

I saw Aames go over to Hof's Hut and park his car there. Then I saw him go into Hof's Hut. No doubt he was going to have

dinner. I looked at my watch. Five thirteen. Then I parked across the street from Hof's Hut and watched the restaurant. I also got hungry, so I took a tuna sandwich and a bottle of Coke out of the bag of groceries and ate the sandwich and sipped the Coke.

Then, I saw Aames come out of the restaurant and walk through the parking lot. I looked at my watch. Six forty-two. I also saw Aames talking to someone on his cell phone. Aames was tall, robust, had black hair, a coarse handsome face, broad shoulders, and he was wearing a black windbreaker and a red shirt with black piping and brown pants and black tennis shoes.

When I saw him reach his car, I then saw him finish talking to whoever it was he was talking to on his cell phone and put his cell phone back into his pocket and unlocked his car and get into his car and start it up. I started up *my* car, too. Then, I saw Aames pull out of the parking lot of Hof's Hut's and

turn onto the road and drive down the road, going in the same direction he had gone in before. I followed him. I didn't see him going home, though. Instead, I saw him turn right off of Pacific Coast Highway and turn onto another road. Then, I saw him drive down that road. *I* turned onto *that* road and followed him.

It was a few minutes later when I saw him come to what looked like a bunker and pull off of the road and drive over to that bunker. The bunker was big, and it had an overhead door, and the overhead door was open, and there was a regular door to walk through, and there was light inside the bunker. I didn't see anyone or anything else around the bunker. I drove past the bunker. I had to. I didn't want Aames or anyone inside the bunker or both to see me. Then, I made a left and turned off of the road and parked my car here. Then I took my binoculars out of the glove compartment and looked through them at the back of the

bunker. Then, I saw more light inside the bunker through the windows. There was no overhead door there, though. Instead, there was a regular door you walk through; I also looked around the area around the bunker. I didn't see anyone or anything outside the bunker. Then, I put the binoculars back into the glove compartment, and then I took my gloves out of my pocket and put them on, and then I got out of my car and locked it, and then I ran over to the bunker. It was time now for me to see what was going on inside the bunker.

When I reached the back of the bunker, I got up against the wall. Then, I went over to the side of the bunker I hadn't been able to see to see what was there: cars. All of them parked next to the wall--including Aames's car. Then, as quickly and silently as I could, I went over to Aames's car and searched his car. Nothing. Then, I put a bug underneath the dashboard of the front seat of his car. Then, I went back to the other side of the

bunker I had been at so I could look through the windows and see what was going on inside the bunker. I saw what looked like an office. There were things inside it that indicate it *was* an office; a desk, chairs, a couch, filing cabinets, and a garbage can, but no landline phones. Then, I went over to the other window to look inside it. Then, I saw people shooting guns--both pistols and rifles --with silencers on them at targets on bales of hay. But I couldn't see anymore. So I went through the door and closed it as quickly and silently as I could.

I was standing inside the hall now. Then, I got up against the wall and moved over to the end of it as quickly and silently as possible so I could see what else was going on inside the room. More people were doing some filing on some guns, and other people were disassembling guns and reassembling the same guns to make them look like different guns. I also saw other people putting guns into boxes individually. I also

saw Aames inside the room. He was talking to someone. Although I couldn't hear what it was he was saying to that person. So I took a gun and bug out of my pocket, and then I put the bug into the gun, and then I aimed the gun at a good place on the wall to shoot the bug into, and then I fired the gun, and then the bug shot out of the gun and hit its target. Fortunately the sound of my firing the gun that had shot the bug into the wall hadn't been heard because of the sounds of what the people inside the bunker were doing. I also saw and heard generators inside the bunker. Then, as quickly and silently as I could, I put the gun back into my pocket, and then, as quickly and silently as I could, I took out of my pocket the radio to the bug I had shot into the room, and then I turned it on and adjusted the volume on so only I could hear what was on the radio, and then I put the radio to my ear and listened.

"We've got a lot of orders for guns this time," the man said to Aames and showed him the paper in his hand.

"Well, that's good," Aames said, smiling.

Then, Aames and the man looked at what the other men were doing. And I got out of the bunker as quickly and silently as I could and ran back to my car and unlocked it and got into it, and then I put the radio on the front seat of my car, and then I started up my car and drove a few yards further away from the bunker to make sure that Aames and the other people inside the bunker won't see me and continued listening in on what was going on inside the bunker. I couldn't hang around inside the bunker any longer than I could. There was no good place inside the bunker to hide in while I watch what the people inside the bunker were doing. And I did want to find out what those people were doing. So I was going to have to improvise on that.

When I was good distance away from the bunker, I pulled off of the road and turned around and parked my car and took my binoculars out of the glove compartment and looked through them and continued watching the bunker and took my cell phone out of my pocket and called Stephanie and told her I had followed and watched Aames after he had gotten off work, and where he had gone after work, and what he was doing now, and what I had seen going on inside the bunker.

"I see," Stephanie said after I had finished.

"Could you find out what you can about that bunker?"

"Yeah. I'll get back to you."

"All right," Then I hung up. So did Stephanie. Then I resumed watching the bunker. Although I didn't hear anything else about what they were doing inside the bunker. Instead, I heard them talk about personal things. I also thought.

The person that Aames had been talking to on his cell phone when he was walking out of Hof's Hut and back to his car may have been the person he had been talking to about the amount of orders for guns this time. Either Aames had called him and told him he was going to go over to the bunker and see how things were, or the other person had called Aames and told him to go over to the bunker so he could tell him about the amount of orders for the guns this time. One of the two.

Stephanie called back. She told me that the bunker had been a warehouse that had gone out of business and that no one was using it now.

"I see," I said after Stephanie had finished. "So Aames and those other people inside the bunker and Grimm and Jake must have found out about the bunker and decided to use it to carry out their operations on these guns in. It would be a good place to conduct their operations in."

"Yeah,"

"Have you gotten any sleep?"

"No. Why?"

"You'd better get some. I don't know how long I'm going to be here. So you'd better sleep while you have the chance."

"Well, what about you?" Aren't *you* going to get some sleep?"

"I might after Aames and those people leave the bunker and go home. My guess is they can't stay there all night and work on those guns. Soon or later they'll have to call it a night and resume these operations of theirs at another time. They don't have the facilities at that bunker to eat and sleep. And after they leave, I can sneak inside the bunker and search it. I wasn't able to search it while I was in there. There wasn't a good place inside the bunker to hide in while I watch them work on those guns."

"I see. I understand. All right. I'll get some sleep."

"Good. I'll let you know if I need something."

"All right," Then Stephanie hung up.

So did I. Then I put my cell phone back into my pocket and continued watching the bunker and continued listening in on the bunker.

CHAPTER IX

Three hours went by. Then, I heard the people inside the bunker--including Aames--say that they were going to call it a night and resume the operation tomorrow night. They were getting tired. I liked this. Now I had the chance to get inside the bunker and search it. Then I saw the people leave the bunker by way of the back door of the bunker and go around to the side of the building the cars were at, and I also saw the lights inside the building being extinguished, and then I saw Aames walk out of the back door and lock it, and then I saw him walk around to where the cars where, and then I saw all of the people--including Aames--drive away from the bunker in two different directions on this road.

After I saw all of the people leave the bunker, I started up *my* car and drove over

to the bunker without speeding so the people from the bunker won't hear my speeding over to the bunker. Although I *was* in a hurry to get inside the bunker and search it.

When I got to the bunker, I drove around to the side of the bunker the people's cars had been at and parked my car here. Then I got out of it and locked it. Then I went behind the bunker and took my lock pick out of my pocket and picked the lock of the back door, and then I went into the bunker and closed and locked the door behind me. Then I took my flashlight out of my pocket and turned it on and shot the light in front of me, and then I walked through the hall until I got to the end of it. Then I stopped and looked around and scanned the whole area with the flashlight. Then I walked into the room. Then I saw more inside this room than I had seen before: the facilities for filing serial numbers off of guns as well as the facilities for disassembling and reassembling

guns to make the guns look like different guns and the facilities for putting the guns inside the boxes individually. I got out my recorder and recorded everything I saw inside *this* room. Then I put my recorder back into my pocket, and then I took my camera out of my pocket and photographed everything I saw inside *this* room. Then I put my camera back into my pocket and went to the room that looked like the office.

The door to *this* room was locked. So I took my lock pick set out of my pocket and picked the lock of the door, and then I went into the room and closed and locked the door and put my lock pick set back into my pocket. Then, I shot the light of my flashlight into the room and scanned the area of the room with the flashlight and looked around.

The first thing I did was pick the lock of the door on the filing cabinets and looked into the cabinets. All I saw inside the cabinets were papers. No folders. I looked at

all of the papers. They were the orders for the guns that Aames and that other man had talked about. I took them over to the desk and put them on the desk and spread them out on the top of the desk, and then I put one end of the flashlight in my mouth and shot the light from the other end of the flashlight on the papers, and then I took my camera out of my pocket and photographed every one of these papers. Then I put the papers back into the filing cabinets and locked up the cabinets. Then I looked through the desk. Nothing much here. Just paper and pencils and pens and a stapler and staples. Then, I took the lid off of the garbage can to look inside the garbage can. Inside the garbage can were a stick and ashes. I scooped up some of the ashes to look at them. The ashes had been stirred. I looked at the stick. No doubt the stick was used to stir the ashes. And if the ashes had been stirred, then that would mean that something had been written on something,

paper probably, and then someone had burned the paper or papers and tossed the paper or papers into the garbage can, and after the paper or papers had turned to ashes, the someone had stirred the ashes to make it impossible for someone to find out what had been written on the paper or papers. Then I wondered what had been written on the paper or papers. Then, I looked back at the filing cabinets. Then, I realized that whatever it was that had been written on the paper or papers must have been old orders for guns. And after these orders had been filled, the someone had burned the paper or papers the old orders for the guns had written on and stirred the ashes to make it impossible for someone to find out what had been written on the paper or papers. Then, I got out my digital recorder and recorded everything I saw inside this room, and then I turned the recorder off and put the recorder back into my pocket, and then I left this room and

closed and locked the door, and then I snuck out of the bunker by way of the back door and closed and locked the door, and then I went back to my car so I could get into my car and leave. I was done here at the bunker. I had found out what I had wanted to find out here at the bunker.

When I got here to my car, I unlocked it and got into it, and then I started it up and drove away from the bunker. I looked at my watch. Eleven fifty-six. Almost midnight. I decided to go back to my hotel and turn in. There wasn't anything else about what Stephanie and I needed to know that I could do right now. So I might as well turn in while I had the chance.

When I got back here to my hotel, I turned on the light and searched the room and the phone. I was pretty sure that no one new from the guns stolen to order operation had searched my room and tapped my phone because of the kind of lock there was

on the door, and because of people being around, but, just in case.

The room was clean. So was the phone. Then I set the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up at later, and then I got undressed and got into my pajamas, and then I put my gun underneath the pillow, and then I turned off the light and got into bed and went to sleep.

The next morning, I was here at Hof's Hut. Sitting at a booth and having breakfast. Which consisted of bacon, scrambled eggs, hash browns, and whole wheat toast, and I washed all of this down with orange juice and coffee.

I felt better after I had eaten. Now I was having more coffee, and I took my cell phone out of my pocket and called Stephanie so I could make an appointment to see her.

I was here at her place now. She had told me I could see her today, and then she had told me when today I could see her. Now the

both of us were sitting on the couch and sipping coffee, and I told her what I had found at the bunker.

"Guns, huh?" Stephanie said after I had finished.

"That's right," I confirmed. "And it looks like these people steal these guns and file off the serial numbers on these guns, and then they reassemble these guns to make them look like different guns, and then they put these guns into boxes and send these guns to the people who want these kinds of guns-- guns stolen to order."

"Yeah. And since they file off the serial number on these guns, then that would mean that the people who want these kinds of guns want to use these kinds of guns to commit some of kind crime with. Like a murder or an assassination or a hold up."

"That' right. And if the gun is stolen or lost, then the people who use these guns could have the people who are in on the

guns stolen to order operation make more guns for them."

"Of course,"

"And it looks like Aames is in charge of this operation since he is a gunsmith. What better person to be in charge of this kind of operation than a gunsmith?"

"Yeah. But Grimm. Where does *he* come in?"

"He must be taking orders for these kinds of guns for people who want these kinds of guns. That person gets a hold of Grimm and tells him he wants to meet him somewhere so he can tell him what kind of gun he wants. They don't talk about what kind of gun he wants on the phone, though. Such a phone conversation would be overheard. So the person tells Grimm in code he wants to meet Grimm somewhere. And then Grimm and that person meet at the place they agreed to meet at, and then the person tells Grimm what kind of gun he wants, and then Grimm writes down the

specifications for this gun, and then the person pays Grimm for the gun he wants at that time, or he pays for the gun when he receives it, and then Grimm goes to the bunker and tells the people there what kind of gun the person wants and shows those people the specifications for that gun, and then those people make that gun for the person, and then they deliver that gun to that person."

"I see."

"All of this would explain the conversation you overheard Grimm and that other person had at that party that you and Grimm and the other person were at."

"Yes, it would. And Lydia must have had something to do with these guns stolen to order operation."

"My guess is she didn't. But she could have. I think that the reason why she was killed was because she could have found out about the guns stolen to order operation. And the people who were in on the guns

stolen to order operation couldn't have this. My guess is that she got interested in Grimm, and so she wanted to know as much about him as she could. Then Grimm told the other people who were in on the guns stolen to order operation about what Lydia was doing, and then they had Jake kill Lydia to keep Lydia from finding out about the guns stolen to order operation."

"Makes sense,"

"Yes, it does. And after Jake killed Lydia, he disposed of her body in such a way that it would never be found. But Grimm and Jake and the other people who were in on the guns stolen to order operation couldn't have an investigation of her disappearance. People would notice she wasn't around. And so they came up with a way to keep people from noticing Lydia's disappearance, *and*, to remove all suspicion from themselves: they found someone who looked exactly like Lydia and had her impersonate Lydia and go back up to Bellingham shortly before Lydia's

vacation was over, and Jake must have followed Kathy Barlow, the girl who looked exactly like Lydia, and impersonated Lydia, all the way back up to Bellingham, and when they got up to Bellingham, Jake must have seen Kathy at a good place where he could kill her and make her look like Lydia was the victim of robbery and murder, and then he killed her and robbed her to make it look like Lydia was the victim of robbery and murder, and then Jake must have hung around in Bellingham long enough to make sure that the news of Lydia's being the victim of robbery and murder was in the newspapers or magazines or on TV or radio. And after he found out that the news of Lydia's being the victim of robbery and murder was known to the public, he left Bellingham and came back here to California and told the rest of the people who were in on the guns stolen to order operation that he had killed Kathy Barlow and made her look like Lydia had been the victim of robbery

and murder and stuck around to hear the news about Lydia's being the victim of robbery and murder and heard it. Now all suspicion of their killing Lydia here in California was removed from them because Jake had made it look like Lydia died up in Bellingham. But the only thing that they worried about was Kathy Barlow's disappearance here in California. They realized that there would be an investigation of her disappearance. And such an investigation could uncover their guns stolen to order operation. But they also realized that that could be highly unlikely. They no doubt made sure that nothing would connect them to their having Kathy impersonate Lydia and go back to Bellingham, and then Jake killed Kathy and made her look like Lydia was the victim of robbery and murder. And they also realized that people--including the police--would look for Kathy for a long time, but they

won't find her. And then they'd stop looking for her."

"Of course. Makes sense."

"Yes, it does. So all we have to do now is follow Grimm wherever he goes and watch whatever he does so we can see him take a customer's order for a gun and take that order to the bunker and hear his talking to the other people who are in on the guns stolen to order operation about the gun the customer ordered and about anything else having to do with their operation. Then we can tell the police what we found out, and then the police can arrest them."

"Of course. You mean that woman, Kathy Barlow, the woman who impersonated Lydia, was staying at my place shortly before she went up to Bellingham?"

"Yeah. They must have found out where she was staying before or after they killed her, or maybe Grimm told them where she was staying before or after they killed her."

I was leaving Stephanie's place now. It was time now for me to go over to Grimm's place and put it under surveillance, and then follow him wherever he goes and watch whatever he does so I can see his taking a customer's order, and then take that order to the bunker, and then he and the people at the bunker talk about the customer's order, and about anything else having to do with their operation.

The radio to the bug I had put inside Grimm's landline phone at home, and the radio to the bug I had put inside Grimm's cell phone, and the radio to the bug I had put inside Grimm's place, were on the front seat of my car. I listened to them while I drove over to Grimm's place. Then, I heard Grimm's landline phone ring. Then, I heard Grimm answer the phone.

It was Aames.

"Val. How are you doing?" Grimm said.

"Worried."

"Oh?" Grimm sounded like he was wondering.

"Yeah. I haven't heard from Jake about his taking care of Frank Hurley. I thought he would have told me he took care of Hurley. I tried to get a hold of him at his place on his landline. No answer. I also tried to get a hold of him on his cell phone, but there was no answer. And the strange thing about his cell phone, I didn't hear anything on his cell phone when I called. I didn't even hear the phone ring. Nothing. It was like the phone was dead. Or maybe the battery was dead, but he had no time to charge the battery."

"Well, that could be it. And, maybe it's taking longer for Jake to take care of Hurley. There is that possibility."

"Yeah, there is. Have *you* heard from Jake?"

"No. I haven't."

"Well, then I'll have Leon find out why we haven't heard from Jake."

"All right. Anything else, Val?"

"No, that's it. Bye, Harold,"

"Bye, Val,"

Then they hung up. And I continued listening to the radios while I continue driving over to Grimm's place. But Stephanie didn't call me and tell me what she heard. Since the receivers to the radios were still at her place and she was still listening to them. Maybe she had no reason to call me and talk to me about Aames's worrying about why he hadn't heard from Jake.

I was here at Grimm's place now. Parked across the street from it and a few yards away from it and watching it. And I still listened to the radios, too. Then, I heard Grimm's landline phone ring again. Then, I heard him answer the phone.

It was Aames again.

"Val," Grimm said. "How are you?"

"Still worried."

"Oh?" Grimm sounded like he was wondering again.

"Yeah. I just heard from Leon. He found out what happened to Jake: there was a disturbance at his place and someone called the police. When the police got there, they saw Jake inside his living room. Sitting in his recliner chair with his gun in his right hand and a bottle of Whiskey in his left hand, and the TV was on real loud. And Jake was drunk. He looked like he had been drinking heavily."

"Jake drinking heavily? And he had his gun in one hand and a bottle of Whiskey in his other hand? And the TV was on real loud?"

"That's right."

"That doesn't sound like Jake."

"No, it doesn't."

"Why would he do it?"

"I don't know. But I'm having Leon find out. I'm also having him take care of Hurley since Jake will be unable to take care of Hurley, and we'll be unable to hear from Jake from now on."

"Of course. Anything else, Val?"

"No. That's it. I'll keep in touch."

"Please do."

Then both men hung up. And I continued listening to the radios and continued watching Grimm's place. And Stephanie didn't call me and talk to me about Aames's phone conversation with Grimm about what Leon had found out about what had happened to Jake. Maybe she had no reason for calling me and talking to me about Aames's phone conversation with Grimm about what Leon had found out about what had happened to Jake.

CHAPTER X

I heard Grimm's landline phone ring again. Then, I heard him answer the phone.

"Hello," a male voice said. Although I didn't recognize the voice. "Is this Harold Grimm?"

"Yes. This is Harold Grimm."

"Mr. Grimm, my name is Jed Portman. You were recommended to me by another man who did business with you: a Mr. Joe White."

"Oh, yes. Mr. White."

"Well, he told me that you're the one to talk to about special orders."

"Special orders?"

"That's right."

"Yes. I'm the one to talk to about special orders."

"Good,"

"Where and when would you like to talk to me a special order."

Then the two of them made arrangements. After that, they hung up. Then I thought. Maybe Grimm and this Jed Portman had been talking about Portman's wanting to order a gun stolen to order. There was that possibility. But they hadn't said so on the phone. Which meant that they had said so in code on the phone. That made sense. They wouldn't want this conversation to be overheard. It'd be dangerous if they would. I called Stephanie and told her what I had heard Grimm and Portman had talked about on the phone and what my theory for it was, and then I asked her where this place that Grimm and Portman were going to meet at and conduct their business at, and she told me, and then she told me how to get there, and I wrote the directions down in my notebook. Then Stephanie told me that she was going to find out what she can about Portman and Joe

White. Then we hung up. After that, I continued watching Grimm's place and continued listening to the radios and kept track of time.

Stephanie called me back and told me what she had found out about Portman and White; Portman lived in Huntington Beach, and he was a business man. Then Stephanie told me what Portman looked like: he was tall, thin, had light brown hair, light green eyes, and regular features. And White lived in Sunset Beach, California, and he was a courier. Then Stephanie told me what White looked like: he wasn't very tall, had white hair, dark blue eyes, broad shoulders, a square face, and thick lips. Then I told Stephanie that I was still here at Grimm's place, still watching it. But Grimm hadn't come out of his place. Then we hung up and I continued watching Grimm's place and continued keeping track of time.

Then, I saw Grimm walk down to his car. He was wearing a grayish three piece suit

and a melon colored shirt and a black and olive green stripe tie and black leather shoes. And he was carrying a black leather brief case. I looked at my watch. Ten thirty-six.

Less than half an hour before Grimm's meeting with Portman. Then, I saw Grimm reach his goldenrod Monte Carlo with black hard top, and then I saw him get into the car, and then I heard him start up the car, and then I started up *my* car and pulled away from the curb after I saw Grimm pull away from the curb so I could follow Grimm.

Woody's Diner was on Pacific Coast Highway.

I was here at Woody's Diner now. I had followed Grimm over here to Woody's Diner and saw him go into the restaurant. Then I had parked across the street from the restaurant. Now I was watching the restaurant and keeping track of time. Woody's Diner was where Grimm and Portman were going to have their meeting. I also got hungry, so I took a tuna sandwich

and a bottle of Coke out of my bag of groceries and ate the sandwich and sipped the Coke.

About two hours went by. Then, I saw Grimm and Portman walk out of the restaurant. Portman was wearing a brown suit, a white shirt, no tie, open collar, and black leather shoes.

Then I saw Grimm get into his car and start it up and drive off, and I also saw Portman get into his tan Buick and start it up and drive off, and then I started up *my* car and pulled away from the curb and into the street and drove down the street so I could continue following Grimm wherever he goes and watch whatever he does.

We were driving down Pacific Coast Highway now. Then, I saw Grimm turn onto the same street that Aames had turned onto when he had gone to the bunker, and I turned onto that street, too. Then, I saw Grimm turn off of the street and drive over to the bunker, and I drove past the bunker

so Grimm and anyone inside the bunker wouldn't see me, and when I was a good distance away from the bunker, I pulled off of the road and onto the shoulder and turned around and looked at the bunker and listened to the radio to the bug I had put inside the bunker, and the radio to the tap inside Grimm's cell phone, and the tap inside Grimm's landline phone.

I heard everyone inside the bunker say hello to Grimm and vice versa. Then, I heard Grimm talking to the same person Aames had talked to about how it was going on the sales of the guns stolen to order.

"Our new customer is Jed Portman," Grimm said to the man. "Joe White recommended me to him. This is the kind of gun he wants."

"I see," the man said. "Well, I think we can make that kind of gun for him. It'll be three thousand dollars. And as usual, we'll let you know when we've finished making the gun, and then you can tell Mr. Portman

and tell him his gun's been made, and then the two of you can make arrangements for where and when you can deliver the gun to him, and when you give him the gun, he pays for it."

"Of course." Then Grimm got out his cell phone and called Portman and told Portman everything the man had told Grimm. Then they hung up. Then he spoke to the man: "He understands. And he'll be waiting to hear from me."

"Good."

I didn't hear Grimm and the man talk about anything else having to do with the guns stolen to order operation. But I continued watching the bunker and continued listening in on the bunker and continued listening in on Grimm's cell phone and continued listening in on Grimm's landline phone until I saw Grimm leave the bunker. Then I left the bunker, too. Although I wasn't going to continue following Grimm wherever he goes and

watch whatever he does. There was no reason to. Then I took my cell phone out of my pocket and called Stephanie and requested a meeting with her. Then we decided on where and when to meet. After that, we hung up.

When we got to Pacific Coast Highway, we turned left on the street and drove down the street, and when I saw nearest restaurant, I pulled into the parking lot of the restaurant and parked my car here and went into the restaurant and sat at the counter and looked at a menu. I was getting hungry, so I might as well eat while I had the chance to eat.

My meal came, and then I dug right into it; a cheeseburger with fries, and I washed it down with a chocolate milk shake.

I felt better after I had eaten. Then I left a nice tip on the counter, and then I paid the check and left the restaurant, and then I went back to the hotel, taking indirect routes there so Leon wouldn't know where I

was going, and looked into my side- and rear mirrors to see if Leon were following me. Although I didn't know what Leon looked like, and I didn't know what kind of car he drove.

I was here inside my hotel room now. Searching it and searching the phone. I was pretty sure that Leon wouldn't have found and searched my hotel room and tapped my phone, because of the kind of lock on the door, and because there were lots of people around, but, just in case.

The room was clean. So was the phone. Then I got undressed and took a shower, and then I went back into the bedroom and set the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up at tonight, and then I put my gun underneath the pillow, and then I got into bed and went to sleep.

Stephanie and I were here at Domenico's now. It was a restaurant here in Belmont Shore. We were sitting at a table and eating Chicken Parmesan Sandwiches and washing

them down with white wine. We didn't talk about the case while we ate, though. Instead, we talked about other things.

We felt better after we had eaten. Now we were having more white wine, and then we talked about what we were going to have to do now in the case: which was tell the police what we had found. It looked like we were going to be able to do that.

I left a nice tip on the table, and then I paid the check, and then Stephanie and I left Domenico's and went back to Stephanie's place and collected all of the information on the case we were going to need to show the police, and then I left Stephanie's place and went back to my hotel, taking indirect routes back to my hotel so Leon wouldn't follow me, although I didn't know what Leon looked like, and I didn't know what kind of car Leon drove, and when I got to my hotel, I searched the room and the phone. Although I realized that Leon would have a difficult or impossible time getting into my room and

searching it and tapping the phone, because of the lock on the door, and because of people being around the hotel, but, just in case.

The room was clean, and so was the phone. Then I got undressed and went into the bathroom and took a shower, and then I went back into the bedroom and set the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up at tomorrow, and then I put my gun underneath the pillow, and then I got into bed and went to sleep.

The next day, I got the film in my camera developed, and then I called Stephanie and told her I had the pictures of what I had discovered in the case. Then we decided on when to go to the police.

CHAPTER XI

The next day, Stephanie and I went to the police department in Seal Beach, and when we got here, we told the person at the desk why we needed to see the police, and then the person at the desk got on the phone and talked to someone, and then he replaced the receiver and told Stephanie and me who we could talk to and where his office was and how to get there.

We were here inside Criminal Investigations now. And inside Lieutenant Dean Walder's office and sitting in front of his big blond desk while Lieutenant Walder himself was sitting behind his desk, and we told Lieutenant Walder everything we had discovered in the case, and he listened to the recordings of what we had discovered in the case, and he looked at the photographs of what we had discovered in the case.

Lieutenant Walder's expression became fixed after he had heard the recordings and after he had seen the photographs. "So there's a gun stealing to order operation here in Seal Beach," he then said.

"That's right," I confirmed.

"And you think that Lydia Hollister's murder has to do with this operation."

"Yes, I do. It would explain the theory I had for her murder."

"Yes. It would. And it would explain Kathy Barlow's disappearance, too. Although it looked like these people made sure there was nothing to connect them and their operation to Kathy Barlow's disappearance."

"That's right. But they knew that there would be the possibility of an investigation of her disappearance, and such an investigation could uncover their operation. They had to be aware of this. But they realized that it would be very unlikely that such an investigation would uncover their operation since they made sure that there

was nothing to connect them and their operation to Kathy Barlow's disappearance."

"Of course. And the way they set up Lydia Hollister's murder was clever: making it look like she was the victim of robbery and murder after Kathy Barlow impersonated Lydia Hollister and went to Bellingham. So all suspicion would be removed from them. And so there wouldn't be an investigation of her murder."

"Yeah,"

"Well, Aames and Grimm were careful about what they talked about on the phone when they *were* talking about Lydia Hollister and Kathy Barlow. Right now it sounds like they know about what happened to Lydia Hollister and Kathy Barlow, although they didn't say what happened to Lydia Hollister and Kathy Barlow. And Grimm hasn't given Portman his gun yet. But if we can see Grimm give Portman his gun, then we can arrest them. They would have to explain why there's no serial number on the gun. Now I

don't know if we'll be able to get them and the rest of the people who are in on the guns stolen to order operation to tell us what they did to Lydia Hollister and Kathy Barlow after we arrest them for these guns stolen to order operation. Maybe they *will* tell us what they did to Lydia Hollister and Kathy Barlow. Maybe they won't. Maybe they'll remain silent and bring in lawyers. But what we should do before we arrest them is see Grimm giving Portman his gun. That'll help us out on arresting all of these people."

"Of course,"

Stephanie and I were leaving the police department now. We were done there. Now Stephanie took her cell phone out of her purse and called Belinda and told her what she and I had found out so far, and that we had just told the police what we had found out, and what the police and Stephanie and I were going to do.

"Well, that's great," Belinda said after Stephanie had finished. "It looks like you've just about got this finished."

"Yes, it does."

"Well, good luck on what you do."

"Thanks. We'll need it."

"You're welcome. Bye."

"Bye."

Then Stephanie and Belinda hung up. After that, Stephanie put her cell phone back into her purse.

I dropped Stephanie off at her place, and then I went back to my hotel, taking indirect routes back to my hotel to keep Leon from following me, although I didn't know what Leon looked like, and I didn't know what kind of car he drove.

When I got back here to my hotel, I searched it and the phone. I was pretty sure that Leon hadn't been here and had searched my hotel room and had tapped my phone, because of the kind of lock on the

door, and because people were around, but, just in case.

Both the room and the phone were clean. The room hadn't been searched, and the phone hadn't been tapped. Then I got undressed and went into the bathroom and took a shower, and then I went back into the bedroom and set the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up later, and then I put my gun underneath the pillow, and then I got into bed and went to sleep. For the rest of the day Stephanie and I were going to need to get some sleep, and then get something to eat, and then get some more sleep, because, starting tomorrow, Stephanie and I were going to help out on putting Aames and Grimm and the other people who were in on the guns stolen to order operation and the bunker and Portman and White under twenty four hour surveillance, and then arrest Grimm for selling Portman his gun stolen to order, and then arrest Aames and

the rest of the people who were in on the guns stolen to order operation and White.

The alarm clock buzzed. I turned it off and looked at the time. The clock told me it was the time I wanted to get up at. Then I got out of bed and into my clothes and left my hotel room and got into my car and went to the nearest restaurant and had a hamburger and apple pie and washed them down with coffee. Then I left a nice tip on the counter, and then I paid the check and left the restaurant and went back to the hotel, again taking indirect routes back to the hotel so Leon won't follow me, although I didn't know what Leon looked like, and I didn't know what kind of car Leon drove.

When I got back here to the hotel, I searched the room and the phone again. I was pretty sure that Leon hadn't been here and hadn't searched the room and hadn't tapped the phone, but, because of the kind of lock on the door, and because there were people around, but, just in case.

Both the room and the phone were clean. The room hadn't been searched, and the phone hadn't been tapped. Then I got undressed and went into the bathroom and took a shower, and then I went back into the bedroom and set the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up at tomorrow, and then I put my gun underneath the pillow, and then I got into bed and went to sleep.

The next day, Stephanie and I were with Lieutenant Walder as the three of us followed Grimm wherever he went and watched whatever he did, and the rest of Lieutenant Walder's men followed and watched Aames and Portman and White and watched the bunker. Although they didn't stake out the bunker. Instead, they drove by the bunker from time to time so that the people inside the bunker wouldn't notice the police's staking the place out.

Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder and I continued following and watching Grimm until we heard someone from the bunker call

Grimm and tell him that Portman's gun was ready. Then Grimm told that person he was going to go over to the bunker and get the gun. Then they hung up, and then we saw Grimm leave his place. He was wearing a grayish three piece suit with light grayish pinstripes and a light green shirt and a black tie and black leather shoes. Then we saw Grim get into his car and drive over to the bunker, and then, we heard him call Portman and tell him his gun was ready, and then the both of them made arrangements for Grimm to give Portman his gun, and then the two of them hung up. Then, we saw Grimm walk out of the bunker with a box in his hand, and then we saw him put the box into his car, and then we saw him get into his car and start it up, and then we saw him drive away from the bunker, and then we continued following him and watching him. Then we saw him go over to Portman's place.

Portman's place was here on Pacific Coast Highway. It was a big white two story house with an orange adobe roof and a matching garage.

Grimm parked his car at the curb in front of the house and got out of the car, and then he took the box out of the car and took the box with him and walked up to the front door of Portman's place and knocked on it.

Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder and I arrived here at Portman's place and saw what Grimm was doing, and then we parked across the street from Portman's place, and then we saw Portman answer the door.

He was wearing a brown suit and a light green shirt, no tie, open collar, and black leather shoes.

Then he let Grimm come into his place, and then Grimm went in, and then Portman closed the door.

Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder and I got out of Lieutenant Walder's navy blue Outback and crossed the street to go over to

Portman's place. Stephanie was wearing a black waist length coat and black pants and black high heel shoes and a white blouse, and her right hand was grasping the strap of her purse, which was resting on her right shoulder, and Lieutenant Walder was tall, robust, pale, had salt and pepper hair, green eyes, horse like features, and he was wearing a blue suit and a light blue shirt and a black tie and black leather shoes.

When we reached Portman's place, Lieutenant Walder knocked on the door.

Portman answered it. "Yes?" he said.

"Mr. Jedidiah Portman?" Lieutenant Walder asked.

"Yes. I'm Jedidiah Portman."

Then Lieutenant Walder took his badge out of his pocket and showed it to Portman and told Portman who he was, and then he introduced Portman to Stephanie and me. Then he told Portman what he and Stephanie and I suspected.

"He's what?!" Portman exclaimed.

"That's right. We have reason to believe that Mr. Harold Grimm, the man who just went into your house, is selling you a stolen gun."

Grimm was wondering what the excitement was about, so, he got up and went to the front door.

Lieutenant Walder saw him and showed him his badge and introduced himself to Grimm and told Grimm the same thing he had told Portman.

"I'm what?!" Grimm exclaimed after Lieutenant Walder had finished.

"That's right," Lieutenant Walder said. "We have reason to believe that you're selling Mr. Portman a stolen gun."

"Have you a warrant?"

"We won't need one. We have probable cause." Then Lieutenant Walder told Grimm and Portman what Stephanie and I had discovered in our investigation.

Both Grimm and Portman looked defeated after Lieutenant Walder had

finished. Then, Lieutenant Walder looked over Grimm's and Portman's shoulders and into the living room, and then he saw the box on the shiny black coffee table. Then, Lieutenant Walder shouldered himself by Grimm and Portman and went into the living room and looked into the box. Then he took the gun out of the box to look at it: a black .45 automatic with black handle. No serial number on the gun. He also saw boxes of bullets for the gun inside the box the gun had been in.

"Shall we go in?" I said to Grimm and Portman. Then, Grimm and Portman and Stephanie and I went into the living room and over to the coffee table, and I closed the door.

"You're under arrest, gentlemen," Lieutenant Walder said to Grimm and Portman. "For the sale of a stolen gun, and for suspicion of murder."

Then I took my recorder out of my pocket and played the recording of the

phone conversation that Grimm and Aames had had after I had had my conversation with Grimm about Lydia's disappearance.

Again, Grimm looked defeated after he had heard the recording and after I had turned the recorder off.

"You killed her, didn't you?" I then asked Grimm.

"No," Grimm said. "I had her killed. She was getting interested in me, wanting to know more about me. I was afraid that she was going to find out about our guns stolen to order operation, and so I told my associates in this operation what Lydia was doing, and then they killed her."

"Where's her body now?"

"In the desert. They took her body out there and discovered a shack out there, and then they put her body in the shack, and then they set fire to the shack."

Then I told Grimm my theory about why they had made it look like Lydia had died up in Bellingham.

"You're right," Grimm admitted after I had finished. "That's how we made Lydia look. And why we made it look like Lydia had been the victim of robbery and murder."

"You killed some people?" Portman asked Grimm, shocked.

"Yes. But we didn't want to do this. But Lydia left us with no choice."

Then Portman looked at Lieutenant Walder and Stephanie and me and spoke to us: "I didn't know anything about this. Granted: I did want the stolen gun, but I didn't know about this murder."

"I imagine you didn't," I said to Portman.

Then Lieutenant Walder put the gun back into the box, and put the box on the coffee table, and then he took his handcuffs out of his pocket and handcuffed both Grimm and Portman and read them their rights, and then Lieutenant Walder and Grimm and Portman walked out to Lieutenant Walder's car, and I collected the gun that Portman was going to have, and

then Stephanie and I left the house so we could join Lieutenant Walder and Grimm and Portman.

CHAPTER XII

The same day, the rest of Lieutenant Walder's men finished putting under surveillance and arrested White and Aames and the other people who were in on the guns stolen to order operation, and then they closed down the guns stolen to order operation and confiscated everything inside the bunker, and they also called and told Missing Persons that they found Kathy Barlow and why she had been missing, and they also called the Bellingham police department and told them the real reason why Lydia had been killed and that her body was down here in California instead of up there in Bellingham, and they also told the Bellingham police department why Kathy Barlow had died up there in Bellingham, and they also told the Bellingham police

department what Stephanie and I had discovered down here in California.

Now there was one last thing in the investigation to do: find, identify, and arrest Leon. By doing that, I was driving down the street in my own car, and Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder were driving far behind me in Lieutenant Walder's car, and some of Lieutenant Walder's men were driving behind Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder.

We were driving down Pacific Coast Highway, going south, towards Newport Beach, California. I looked into the rear- and side-view mirrors of my car. But so far, I didn't see Leon. Although I didn't know what Leon looked like or what kind of car he drove. Then, I saw something. Then my cell phone rang, and then I took it out of my pocket and said hello.

"Hello. Mr. Hurley?" Lieutenant Walder said.

"Yes," I said.

"You see it? The blue VW Fastback?"

"Yeah, I see it."

"Maybe that's our man. It looks like he *is* following you. He's been driving behind you for the past ten minutes."

"Yeah. Maybe he *is* our man."

"I'll try to get the license plate number of his car and try to find out who the car belongs to from the Department of Motor Vehicles, and then I'll try to find out who he is."

"Right." Then I hung up and put my cell phone back into my pocket.

When I got here to a shopping center here in Newport Beach, I made the turn and drove through the shopping center and looked into the rear- and side view mirrors of my car. Then, I saw the VW Fastback. It was driving far behind me.

When I got to the other side of the shopping center, I turned onto the street and drove down the street, going in the direction I had come from, but I was still driving on the same street, and looked into

the rear- and side view mirrors of my car. Again, I saw the VW Fastback. It was still driving far behind me.

I was still driving down Pacific Coast Highway. And still looking into my rear- and side view mirrors of my car. And I still saw the VW Fastback following me.

My cell phone rang. I took it out of my pocket and said.

"Hello. Mr. Hurley? It's Lieutenant Walder. I just found out who owns the blue VW Fastback: Leon Culver. He's lives in Huntington Beach, and he's a freelance missing person's tracer. No criminal record."

"Oh, really," I said. "He must trace missing people for a living whenever he's not doing anything for Aames and Grimm and the other people who were in on the guns stolen to order operation."

"Yeah. He's tall, thin, almost emaciated, has salt and pepper hair, and dark green eyes."

"Yeah. And maybe he's the Leon we're after."

"We'll find out,"

"Yes, we will," Then I hung up and put my cell phone back into my pocket.

We continued driving down Pacific Coast Highway. And I continued looking into the rear- and side view mirrors of my car and still saw the Leon driving the VW Fastback.

When we got to the road the bunker was on, we turned onto it and drove down it. Again I looked into the rear- and side view mirrors of my car. And I still saw the VW Fastback. Still driving far behind me.

We drove past the bunker, and when we got to a shack, I turned off of the road and drove over to the shack, and then I drove behind the shack and parked my car here. Then, I got out of my car and whipped my gun out of my shoulder holster and got up against the wall of the shack, ready to shoot if I had to, and then I walked over to the

other side of the shack as carefully as I could.

When I got to the other side of the shack, I stopped and looked around it as carefully as I could. No one was here. Then I went around to *that* side of the shack, still ready to shoot if I had to.

When I got to the other side of the shack, I stopped and looked around it as carefully as I could. Then, I saw the VW Fastback. It was parked in front of the shack. Then, I saw Leon. He was getting out of the car, and his gun was in his hand. It looked like the kind of gun he had in his gun was a .45 revolver. Then, Leon saw me, and then he fired at me. Quickly I got back behind the wall. Then I heard running. Then I heard a door open and close. Then, as carefully as I could, I looked over the side of the building I was on. Then, I saw Leon's car. But Leon wasn't in it. And he wasn't near the car, either. Then, I realized that Leon may have gone into the shack. I had heard running

and a door opening and closing. Then, as quickly as I could, I got in front of the shack and walked and looked around, still ready to shoot if I had to. Then, I went over to the front door of the shack, and then I got down on the ground on my back, and then I kicked the door open--and then I got to my feet and dove into the shack. Then--there were gunshots!

CHAPTER XIII

Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder and Lieutenant Walder's men reached the shack and drove over to it and came to a complete stop in front of the shack, and then they got out of their cars, and then Lieutenant Walder and his men whipped their guns out of their shoulder holsters and watched the shack, but before Lieutenant Walder could tell his men what to do, he and his men and Stephanie stopped suddenly and looked. Then, their gazes became fixed.

Leon stepped out of the shack. He was wearing a black coat and a light brown shirt and light blue jeans and white tennis shoes. There was blood on his shirt. And his gun was in his right hand. Then, he started to walk. Then, he fell down. Then, *I* walked out of the shack. *My* gun was still in *my* hand. Quickly one of Lieutenant Walder's men

went over to Leon and knelt down to him to check his vitals. He was dead.

Then, Stephanie ran over to me and hugged me. "Thank God, you're alive," she then said to me.

"Yes," I said.

"Yeah," Lieutenant Walder said. "And this Leon had to be the Leon who was supposed to find out what happened to Jake Garner and take care of you."

"Yeah. He has to be. He did follow me, and he did try to kill me."

"Yes, he did. And we did see him pull up in front of the shack and get out of his car, and we did see his gun in his hand, and we did see his spotting you and shooting at you. But now he won't be able to tell the people who were in on the guns stolen to order operation if he found out what happened to Jake, and he won't be able to tell them that he had taken care of you, either."

"I know."

"And now we'll need to search his place. He worked out of there as well as he lived there." Then Lieutenant Walder took his cell phone out of his pocket and called the Morgue and told them to bring a wagon out here for Leon, and then he and the Morgue hung up, and then he told some of his men to stay here at the shack and wait for the wagon and search Leon's car and trace his gun and search the shack. Maybe not much of a crime had been committed inside the shack, since the only thing that had happened inside the shack was Leon's trying to kill me, and my killing Leon in self-defense, but Lieutenant Walder will want to know about the bullets that Leon had fired from his gun. No doubt those bullets had been intended to kill me, and they may have gone into one of, or more than one of, the walls inside the shack. Lieutenant Walder and the rest of his men and Stephanie and I were going to go over to Leon's place and search it. Then Stephanie and Lieutenant

Walder got into Lieutenant Walder's car and drove away from the shack, and the men that Lieutenant Walder had wanted to search Leon's place with Lieutenant Walder and Stephanie and me got into *their* cars and drove away from the shack, and *I* got into *my* car and drove away from the shack.

Leon's place was on Pacific Coast Highway. It was a big white two story house with a dark burgundy roof and a matching garage.

Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder and his men and I were driving away from Leon's place now. We had searched his place. But we hadn't found anything inside it that could tell Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder and me what we needed to know. There was nothing there that could connect Leon to the guns stolen to order operation.

A few days later, we found out from the Morgue that Leon had died from gunshot wounds. Nothing about his death that could

tell Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder and me what we needed to know.

And we found out from Lieutenant Walder's men who had searched Leon's car that Leon's car was clean. There was nothing about Leon's car that could tell Stephanie and Lieutenant Walder and me what we needed to know, either.

And we also found out from Lieutenant Walder's men who had traced Leon's gun that Leon's gun was stolen. There was no serial number on the gun. Because of this, it looked like the people who had been in on the guns stolen to order operation had made this gun for Leon.

We also found out from Lieutenant Walder's men who had searched the shack that the bullets they had dug out of one of the walls of the shack had come from Leon's gun. They had given these bullets to Ballistics, and Ballistics had run the test on the bullets. They hadn't found bullets fired from *my* gun inside any of the walls inside

the shack. Which meant that the bullets I had shot went into Leon's stomach.

And we also found out from Lieutenant Walder's men who had searched the shack that no other crime had been committed inside the shack. Only Leon's trying to kill me, and my killing Leon in self-defense, had happened inside the shack.

The next day, Stephanie and I were here at Stephanie's place. Stephanie was on the phone and telling Belinda that she and I had finished the investigation, and then she told Belinda what she and I had discovered in the investigation.

"I see," Belinda said after Stephanie had finished. "Well, I let you know where and when Lydia's funeral is going to be."

"Please do," Stephanie said. "And I'll be there."

"I need to talk to her," I told Stephanie.

"Mr. Hurley needs to talk to you," Then Stephanie gave me her cell phone, and then I spoke into it to Belinda: "Ms Cranston? I'll

be back up in Bellingham in a few days, and then I'll make my report. Right now I need to rest up before I return."

"I understand. Anything else, Mr. Hurley?"

"No, that's it. Bye."

"Bye." Then Belinda hung up.

So did I. Then I gave Stephanie's cell phone back to her. Then I spoke to Stephanie: "Well. If there isn't anything else, I'm going to go back to my hotel and rest up."

"No. There isn't."

"All right."

Then Stephanie and I got up from the couch, and then Stephanie hugged me. And I hugged her right back.

"Thank you for everything, Mr. Hurley," She said to me.

"You're welcome, Ms Loren," I said to her. Then I left.

I was here inside my hotel room now. In bed and sleeping. And this time I hadn't set

the alarm clock for a time I wanted to get up at. Because this time there wasn't any reason to.

I woke up feeling hungry, so I got dressed and left the hotel and went over to the nearest twenty four hour restaurant and had a hamburger and apple pie and washed it down with coffee, and then I left a nice tip on the counter and paid the check and left the restaurant and went back to the hotel and got undressed and got back into bed and went to sleep. Without setting the alarm clock. Because I still didn't have a good reason for setting the alarm clock. I had no good reason for getting up a time I wanted to get up later.

The next day, I had breakfast here at Hof's Hut.

I felt better after I had eaten the bacon and scrambled egg breakfast I had ordered, and I had washed it down with orange juice and coffee. Now I was having more coffee. Then I left a nice tip on the table, and then I

paid the check and left the restaurant, and then I went to the nearest swim wear shop so I could buy a pair of swimming trunks and a beach towel. It was time now for me to put in some quality recreational time. By doing that, I was going to go to the beach and swim.